

to Him: for the marriage of the Lamb is come, and his wife hath made herself ready" (Rev. 19:5-7);

"And every creature which is in heaven, and on the earth, and under the earth, and such

as are in the sea, and all that are in them, heard I saying, Blessing, and honour, and glory, and power, be unto Him that sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb for ever and ever" (5:13).

## Public prayer

Nigel Bernard

*In his first letter to Timothy the Apostle Paul stated the following reason for writing to Timothy: ". . . that thou mayest know how thou oughtest to behave thyself in the house of God, which is the church [ecclesia] of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth" (3:15). One aspect of behaviour of which Paul spoke was prayer: "I will therefore that men pray every where, lifting up holy hands, without wrath and doubting" (2:8). In this article we will consider prayers spoken in the ecclesia. The principles that underlie public prayers in many ways apply to prayers in general, and thus what follows may overlap with other articles in this issue; but it is hoped that the emphasis on public prayer in the article will ensure that points specific to this type of prayer will be drawn from these principles.*

**I**N SCRIPTURE prayer is likened to incense. As the psalmist wrote: "Let my prayer be set forth before Thee as incense; and the lifting up of my hands as the evening sacrifice" (141:2; cf. Rev. 8:3,4). In the Kingdom incense will once more be offered: "For from the rising of the sun even unto the going down of the same My name shall be great among the Gentiles; and in every place incense shall be offered unto My name, and a pure offering: for My name shall be great among the heathen, saith the LORD [Yahweh] of hosts" (Mal. 1:11).

Incense will be offered "in every place", not just one place. This matches with the phrase "every where" in 1 Timothy 2:8. Paul exhorts us to pray "every where" just as the incense of prayer will be offered "in every place" in the Kingdom. In Isaiah 24 the prophet wrote of a time when the land of Israel would be desolate, but when there would be "fires", or "lights", scattered across the seas giving glory to God:

"When thus it shall be in the midst of the land among the people, there shall be as the shaking of an olive tree, and as the gleaning grapes when the vintage is done. They shall lift up their voice, they shall sing for the majesty of the LORD [Yahweh], they shall cry aloud from the sea. Wherefore glorify ye the LORD [Yahweh] in the fires, even the name of the LORD [Yahweh] God of Israel in the isles of the sea" (vv. 13-15).

Ecclesias today, although not "in every place", nevertheless are in many places throughout the world. God is glorified in the ecclesial "fires" as they shine "as lights in the world" (Phil. 2:15). As they shine, ecclesias, wherever they are, should offer prayer, they should "cry aloud from the sea", a foretaste of when incense will be offered in every place in the Kingdom.

### The ecclesial house of prayer

When Paul wrote of the ecclesial "house of God . . . the pillar and ground of the truth" (1 Tim. 3:15) the Spirit was echoing the mention of the pillar set up as the "house of God" at Bethel (Gen. 28:17-22). The phrase "house of God" also, of course, brings to mind the temple, and its predecessor, the tabernacle. Isaiah spoke of the house of God as a "house of prayer" (Isa. 56:7). Although this speaks of the temple in the Kingdom, nevertheless, just as Christ indicated that the temple in the first century should have been a "house of prayer" (Mt. 21:13), so the ecclesial house should be a "house of prayer". If Christ came to our ecclesia would he find it a "house of prayer", or would he conclude that we had made it into something else? The brother who offers a public prayer on behalf of the ecclesia has an important role in ensuring that the ecclesia is indeed a "house of prayer".

In order to help teach the Israelites, and ourselves, the role of prayer in the house of God, a

model of a house was incorporated into the holy place of the tabernacle. This model was the altar of incense.

### The altar of incense

The instructions for the making of the altar of incense used terminology usually associated with buildings. This is indicated in the AV's marginal rendering. The following quotation incorporates these terms: "And thou shalt overlay it with pure gold, the *roof* thereof, and the *walls* thereof round about, and the horns thereof; and thou shalt make unto it a crown of gold round about" (Ex. 30:3).

The altar, with its roof and walls, was a model of a house. Just as incense was offered on its roof, so prayers were to be offered on the roofs of houses. Peter provided an example of this: "Peter went up upon the housetop to pray about the sixth hour" (Acts 10:9). The altar had "a crown of gold" around its roof. This corresponded to a similar architectural feature that was to be built around the edges of the roofs of houses: "When thou buildest a new house, then thou shalt make a battlement for thy roof, that thou bring not blood upon thine house, if any man fall from thence" (Deut. 22:8). The battlement was a protection to stop people from falling off the roof. The spiritual protection typified by the "crown of gold" was faith (1 Pet. 1:7). When an ecclesia prays, they go, as it were, together onto the roof of their house of prayer, where they are secluded and surrounded by the battlement of faith.

Our ecclesial house of prayer should be safe. Have we checked the battlement recently? When an ecclesia gives a prayer, are some in heart perilously close to the edge, torn like Eutyclus between the lights within and the darkness of the world outside (Acts 20:9)? We should be watchful for our brethren and sisters at all times lest the battlement of faith becomes weak and gives way.

### The Word of God

The holy place in the tabernacle typifies all aspects of how we should behave in the house of God. In the Law, attendance at the altar of incense and care for the lamps are shown to be intimately related: "And Aaron shall burn thereon sweet incense every morning: when he dresseth the lamps, he shall burn incense upon it" (Ex. 30:7). The lamps had to be "dressed" so that they shone brightly. The brighter they shone the easier it would be to see the altar of incense and to attend to it. The lesson is clear: prayer, includ-

ing prayer in the house of God, should be based upon the light of the Word of God.

Often in an ecclesial meeting a portion is read from the Word before a prayer is given. The principle we have just seen from Exodus 30 indicates that this order is fitting. James would seem to confirm this: "Wherefore, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath" (1:19). We should be swift to hear the Word of God and comparatively slower, but nevertheless "instant" (Rom. 12:12), in speaking to God in prayer. Paul said: "What is it then? I will pray with the spirit, and I will pray with the understanding also" (1 Cor. 14:15). The understanding we have comes from the Word of God. Before we attend the altar of incense of prayer we should enlighten our understanding with the Word of God.

When a brother gives a prayer in public, what should he say in his prayer? He may be praising God, giving thanks to God, asking God for a blessing on the meeting, praying for the Kingdom to come, praying for named individuals, praying for forgiveness and several other things too, depending on the circumstances. On all occasions, however, he should draw upon the Word of God. If the Word of God has already been read before he gives the prayer then it is surely right to draw in some way from that particular passage. This may involve no more than thanking God for the passage; it may involve using some words or phrases from that passage; but whatever form the allusion takes we are showing our heavenly Father that we have read an aspect of His Word and are now seeking to bear fruit. As Isaiah wrote: "so shall My word be that goeth forth out of My mouth: it shall not return unto Me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it" (55:11).

The need to include the Word of God in prayer is also seen when some of the ingredients of the incense are considered:<sup>1</sup> "And the LORD [Yahweh] said unto Moses, Take unto thee sweet spices, stacte, and onycha, and galbanum; these sweet spices with pure frankincense: of each shall there be a like weight" (Ex. 30:34).

The Hebrew for "stacte" is similar to a word which means 'drop', for example: "the clouds also *dropped* water" (Judg. 5:4); "my hands *dropped* with myrrh" (Song 5:5). Sometimes 'stacte' is

1. See also the section **Incense and prayer** in ["The importance of prayer"](#), p. 149.

"I was called on to conclude with prayer—a sweet luxury to the weary spirit—the first condition of which is the active consciousness of God's existence: the second, the knowledge of Him as communicated in the Scriptures: the third, the love of Him generated thereby: the fourth, the knowledge of our needs produced by experience and reflection. 'Saying prayer' is not praying. Prayer is the sincere and fervent address to the Father that would be natural in solitude, and at all events that does not depend upon the presence of fellow-worshippers. The prayer that is humanly-inspired is acceptable to neither God nor man. There are prayers that mortify and crush, because they are not prayers, but performances, and odious at that. Sincerity is the virtue that gives grace to all action".

Robert Roberts (1994, third edition), *Diary of a Voyage to Australia*, Christadelphian Scripture Study Service, p. 72.

applied to the words of man: "my speech *dropped* upon them" (Job 29:22). It is also used of the Word of God given through man: "Son of man, set thy face toward the south, and *drop* thy word toward the south, and prophesy against the forest of the south field" (Ezek. 20:46). As we 'drop' words into our prayer, carefully and deliberately, not poured out casually and rashly, we should include words which have been originally 'dropped' to us by God.

The Hebrew for "frankincense" comes from the word meaning 'white'. This speaks of something tried and purified (Dan. 12:10). The psalmist wrote: "Thy word is very pure" (119:140); and in Proverbs it states: "Every word of God is pure" (30:5). Mixed in with our prayer should therefore be the purity of the Word of God.

There are certain advantages to basing a prayer in the ecclesia upon the Word which has just been read. Firstly, it provides the brother giving the prayer guidance as to what to say in his prayer. Secondly, it helps the other members of the ecclesia to follow and understand the prayer which is being given, for if his prayer is based, at least in some small way, on what everybody has just been reading, this will help others to be at one with the brother giving the prayer. A third advantage is that it helps a brother to avoid stock phrases in his prayer. As brethren and sisters we all probably tend to use habitually and repetitively certain words or phrases in our private prayers. When giving a prayer in public this is perhaps more likely because of nerves and the perceived need to pray without hesitation. Either way, privately or publicly, there is a danger of "vain repetitions" (Mt. 6:7). If each day we base our prayers on the daily readings or other passages we have just been reading then our prayers will not fall so easily into this trap.

An example of an ecclesial prayer will now be considered. The prayer is that recorded in Acts 4 following the threatening of Peter and John by the council at Jerusalem.

#### **An example of ecclesial prayer**

Peter and John had been held by the priests and others following the healing of a lame man, because "they taught the people, and preached through Jesus the resurrection from the dead" (v. 2). They were held prisoner overnight and then eventually released, having been "threatened" (v. 21) with regard to preaching the gospel.

In verse 23 we read: "And being let go, they went to their own company, and reported all that the chief priests and elders had said unto them". From this verse we see that the ecclesia was fully updated as to what had taken place. This is important because, when they gave their prayer, they would do so with a sincerity born of the fact that they were fully informed and knew what they would be praying about. This is akin to the way an ecclesial prayer is preceded by the announcements relating to the welfare of brethren and sisters.

Verse 24 states: "And when they heard that, they lifted up their voice to God with one accord, and said, Lord, Thou art God, Which hast made heaven, and earth, and the sea, and all that in them is". They prayed "with one accord", and this oneness of mind was based on all hearing the same account and all reacting in the same way towards what they had heard. They then address God with words taken from Psalm 146, which states: "the LORD [Yahweh] . . . Which made heaven, and earth, the sea, and all that therein is" (vv. 5,6). This illustrates the point made earlier that prayer should be based on the

Word of God. It also shows the importance of praising God and acknowledging His greatness in our prayers.

But why quote from this psalm? Psalm 146 is a psalm which teaches the importance of using life to praise God: "While I live will I praise the LORD [Yahweh]; I will sing praises unto my God while I have any being" (v. 2). It is also a psalm which teaches the futility of trusting in mortal rulers: "Put not your trust in princes" (v. 3). These words are relevant because Peter and John had been threatened by the "princes" of the Jewish world, not least because they had been preaching about life and death, that is, the resurrection of the dead. Moreover, Peter and John had just been released by the rulers, and the psalmist said: "The LORD [Yahweh] looseth the prisoners" (v. 7). Also, the healing of a lame man was at the root of the enmity of the Jews towards Peter and John, and the psalmist said: "the LORD [Yahweh] raiseth them that are bowed down" (v. 8). There is a detailed matching of the psalm with the events which had transpired. This shows us that prayers in the ecclesia, and indeed private prayers, should include Biblical phrases whose context is relevant to what we are praying about.

In their prayer they go on to quote from Psalm 2. Although this psalm ultimately applies to the time of the end, they use its words to comment on the way the Jews and Gentiles had gathered against Christ at his crucifixion. They then say: "And now, Lord, behold their threatenings" (Acts 4:29). By saying these words they were fully presenting the issue before God. It was similar to the way Hezekiah displayed the contents of the letter from Rabshakeh before God: "And Hezekiah received the letter of the hand of the messengers, and read it: and Hezekiah went up into the house of the LORD [Yahweh], and spread it before the LORD [Yahweh]" (2 Kgs. 19:14).

Our ecclesial prayers should thus include mention of specific issues of the moment. However, care should be taken when naming brethren and sisters in prayer. If something of great immediacy has happened where it is understood that all brethren and sisters have a particular brother or sister to the forefront of their minds then mention of names is appropriate. However, the naming of brethren and sisters will inevitably lead to questions as to why certain brethren and sisters were *not* mentioned in a prayer. As a general rule, it is wise to use names primarily in private prayer.

### Lifting up the hands

In Psalm 141:2, from which we have already quoted, the "lifting up of . . . hands" is likened to "the evening sacrifice". The Hebrew here for "sacrifice" is *minchah*. This word can be used of an animal sacrifice (for example, Gen. 4:4), but it often refers to the meal offering. The meal offering represents the work done with a man's hands. When Paul spoke of "lifting up holy hands" (1 Tim. 2:8) he was speaking of the prayerful dedication of work done in the service of the Truth. Thus when we pray in the ecclesia we should ask God to bless the work done in the ecclesia.

### To the glory of God

Solomon wrote: "Be not rash with thy mouth, and let not thine heart be hasty to utter any thing before God: for God is in heaven, and thou upon earth: therefore let thy words be few" (Eccl. 5:2). This provides us with unequivocal guidance as to the length of prayers. They should not be long. The ecclesial prayer in Acts 4 takes less than a minute to speak out loud, in English at any rate, but it covered all that needed to be said. One reason why the prayer in Acts 4 is so short is that it focuses on the matter in hand. A prayer which, for example, is to give thanks for food, should do just that. All too often we use the occasion of a prayer to speak about other things which are not directly relevant.

When the incense was prepared it had to be beaten "very small" (Ex. 30:36). There was no scope for moulding the incense in any way. In like manner public prayers should not show off our understanding of Scripture or our rhetorical skill. Our own clever moulding of words and phrases should be crushed so that God, not the flesh, is glorified.

Sometimes a prayer spoken in public may be given partly with the intention of providing a witness to those who are listening. The prayer given by Christ during the raising of Lazarus provides an example of this (Jno. 11:41,42). However, this should not provide the excuse for using public prayer as a means of lecturing those present, whether believers or interested friends. When speaking of the incense, God said: "Who-soever shall make like unto that, to smell thereto, shall even be cut from his people" (Ex. 30:38). Incense should be offered to God, not man. When we give a prayer in public we are speaking to God, and all that we say should be directed towards that end. If we use a prayer, for example,

to 'improve' or 'correct' a talk just given by a speaker we are in effect pretending to speak to God when we are really talking to our brethren and sisters. As the Law of Moses indicates, this is a sin.

The foregoing about not using prayers to teach others provides a contrast with singing hymns. As a browse through the hymn book will show, not all hymns are addressed primarily to God, although all should be sung to His glory. In some hymns we address each other. As such, hymns can be used to teach each other. As Paul wrote: "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom; teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs,

singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord" (Col. 3:16).

### Conclusion

Although not speaking of prayers in Colossians 3:16, the command to "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom" also provides the foundation for praying in the ecclesia, as we have seen. The Word shows us what to pray about and how we should pray. To be able to see when offering the incense we must first attend to the lamps. These things in turn will enhance our fellowship, typified by the 'bread of the faces', or shewbread, as we meet face to face in the ecclesia.

## Prayer and meditation

Mark Vincent

*What is meditation, and how might it help to make the disciple more spiritually complete? What should be meditated upon, and how might the skill be practised? To what end can it serve as part of the disciple's spiritual repertoire? This article seeks to answer these questions.*

**F**IRST LET IT be acknowledged that meditation is certainly a Biblical topic. The English word and its derivatives occur around twenty times in the AV. But what does it really entail? It is best to start with some definitions.

In English, the word comes from a Latin root which means 'to contemplate'. It is not a common word any more, with contemporary civilisation being as hurried and superficial as it is. When the term is used, one might be more inclined to think of the Buddhist tradition than the Christian. For Buddhists, meditation is a core component of the path to Enlightenment. It involves self-discipline, a purification and expansion of the mind, according to which selfishness and ill-thought are purged away.

More importantly, there is a good Hebrew background to the concept. The Hebrew verb for meditation is the verb *hagah*, a word which in some contexts has to do with eating. It is used of a lion growling and drooling over its prey, and more generally of a rumbling, a groaning or even a sighing sound. This brings out the acts of reiteration and processing which accompany medi-

tation, along with the possibility that it may involve enunciation.

### The cow and the lion

Before getting to the lion and its dinner, a helpful initial metaphor for meditation might come from thinking about the cow. A cow spends virtually its entire day engaged in the enterprise of ruminating (interesting that this very verb *ruminare* is used metaphorically in English to describe prolonged reflection); the Scriptures correspondingly speak of God's words as the believer's meditation "all the day" (Ps. 119:97). It is an analogy worth pressing, for a cow has no less than seven stomachs through which each mouthful of grass must pass before it may finally be absorbed into the system. Meditating is diametrically opposed to hurry. Whoever saw a cow racing through its daily diet? The image of the cow steadily working its way through the cud, and the elaborate digestive process which ensues, is a powerful one to keep in mind when thinking about meditation.

For captured in that very image is one of the great obstacles to meditation. We are not cows, and we lead far busier lives than our ruminant friends. When shall I find time to chew so slowly, to think so reflectively? How can I change the speed of the clock to find the space for those moments of careful thought? This is **the first challenge to meditation**.

As already mentioned, the verb *hagah* is used of a lion drooling over his prey, that moment of