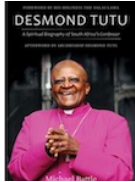


BLESSED DESMOND TUTU: SPIRITUAL PRACTICE AND CHRISTIAN ACTION

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I have two images of Bishop Tutu. He is the backseat of a car praying the daily office and Father Trevor Huddleston, CR[i] visiting a thirteen year-old Tutu in his two year struggle with tuberculosis.

There are two themes, seen in Desmond Tutu's life, that I'll explore. First, the relationship between living the spiritual practices of the Anglican tradition and how that influences Christian action for justice. The second, in a future post, on the role of Religious Orders and their members on the rest of the church.

In Michael Battle's book on Bishop Tutu he wrote, "Serving as Tutu's chaplain in those years, praying, driving, and even jogging with him, I learned not to talk too much, to allow Tutu to be contemplative in the midst of his hectic schedule. I recall one such trip to St. James Church, a white church in Kenilworth, a suburb of Cape Town. The day before, the church had witnessed a massacre, perpetrated by four black members of the Azanian People's Liberation Army (APLA). Eleven members of the congregation were killed and fifty-eight wounded. Tutu had been called out of morning prayer to make the emergency trip, and as we set off on the journey, I heard him resume his prayers from the back seat. It was at that moment I realized the insight of Tutu's deep spirituality: the hardest thing for him in the midst of a turbulent world was to keep saying his prayers every day."

Just as in 1984, when I drove him to address a convention, there he was in the backseat of a car praying the Daily Office. Battle might be right that the bishop found it hard to stay with the prayers when things were stormy and chaotic. The word that came to my mind was "necessary." It was necessary for him to be steadfast in the church's rhythms of adoration and praise. His ability to engage what he faced was depended on his relationship with God and his relationship with God had its grounding in mass, office, and personal devotions, especially silence and reflection.

He was clear about the nature of the church and its worship.

The Church is the fellowship whence adoration, worship and praise ascend to the heavenly throne and in company with the angels and archangels and with the whole host of heaven we sing as did the cherubic choir in Isaiah's vision and as

we shall soon be bidden to do in his glorious service: Holy, Holy, Holy, Lord God of Hosts, Heaven and earth are full of thy glory.

That's from *Tutu: Voice of the Voiceless*, Shirley Du Boulay, p. 213. It's from a sermon by Bishop Tutu as he was enthroned as Bishop of Johannesburg. Du Boulay introduced the quote this way – "for the most part, however, his charge was a theological dissertation on the nature of the church and his intentions for the diocese. He questioned whether the church was a cozy club, a mystical ivory tower, a spiritual ghetto or a center of good works. No, it existed primarily for the worship of God."

At the center of his spiritual practice was the Threefold Rule of Prayer. It was the Prayer Book Pattern of Eucharist, Daily Office, and the assumption of personal devotions. And all that then adapted to his personal temperament and African context and sensibilities. Du Boulay wrote of the "rich diversity" of his nature. It was both formal and informal, dignified and intimate. Deeply Anglican, it held African elements in an easy embrace, deeply spiritual, it was imbued with the spirit of festivity. Its high seriousness did not exclude humour" (p. 257)

"When he was an active bishop, Tutu kept a rigorous schedule. At four in the morning he would wake, and then be on his knees in prayer for an hour. At five thirty, Tutu would walk and be silent. He would shower and be at his desk around six—often reading but also doing some desk work. At seven forty-five there would be morning prayer followed by the eight o'clock Eucharist. Breakfast would come around eight thirty." (Michael Battle, *Desmond Tutu: A Spiritual Biography of South Africa's Confessor*) This was the kind of disciplined prayer life he had been formed in when a student at St. Peter's preparing for ordination. "Every day there was compulsory meditation before breakfast, followed by Matins and Mass. There were frequent retreats and devotional addresses. He was continually impressed by the amount of time these men devoted to prayer; apart from the round of monastic offices, there was always someone on his knees in the Fathers' chapel." (p.48)

The bishop's approach seems to have been grounded in a sensitivity that Evelyn Underhill expressed this way.

"One's first duty is adoration, and one's second duty is awe and only one's third duty is service. And that for those three things and nothing else, addressed to God and no one else, you and I and all other countless human creatures evolved upon the surface of this planet were created. We observe then that two of the three things for which our souls were made are matters of attitude, of relation: adoration and awe. Unless these two are right, the last of the triad, service, won't be right. Unless the whole of your...life is a movement of praise and adoration, unless it is instinct with awe, the work which the life produces won't be much good." (p 22 *Concerning the Inner Life*, Evelyn Underhill)

"For the real saint is neither a special creation nor a spiritual freak. He is just a human being in whom has been fulfilled the great aspiration of St. Augustine – "My life shall be a real life, being wholly full of Thee." And as that real life, the interior union with God grows, so too does the saints' self-identification with humanity grow. They do not stand aside wrapped in delightful prayers and feeling pure and agreeable to God. They go right down into the mess; and there, right down in the mess, they are able to radiate God because they possess Him." (p 96)

The parish development work related to this is about how we ground a core of parishioners in the same Threefold Rule of Prayer, our tradition's starting place for adoration and praise. In such work we properly orient people toward the true nature of the church, connect them with the ancient practices that nurture the stability and flexibility needed for modern life, and strengthen them for their efforts "right down into the mess."

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You can find handouts of the Threefold Rule of Prayer among the [Shaping the Parish Resources](#)

[i] Trevor Huddleston served as a priest in South Africa from 1940 to 1956. Most of that time was at the Community of the Resurrection mission station at Rosettenville (Johannesburg, South Africa). He later served as master of novices at CR's Mirfield mother house in West Yorkshire, as prior of the order's priory in London, as Bishop of Masasi (Tanzania), and Bishop of Stepney, a suffragan bishop in the Diocese of London.