

5th December 2024

Prayer

“There was a man sent from God whose name was John.”

Bible, *John 1:6*

John Baillie was a Church of Scotland minister in the first half of 20th century, and he and his brother, Donald, were among the foremost theologians of their age. Donald was Professor of Systematic Theology in St Andrew's University, while John held academic posts in the UK, USA and Canada. John also served as Moderator of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland in 1943 and was Principal of Edinburgh's New College and Dean of the Faculty of Divinity from 1950 to 1956.

In his early years as a Professor in New College, John Baillie wrote what is regarded as a devotional classic – *A Diary of Private Prayer*. This little publication has been a constant source of comfort for nearly sixty years and is one of my trusted companions on my Advent journey.

Published in 1936, *A Diary of Private Prayer* was given to me on the day I made an adult commitment of faith and became a Communicant member of the Church. I had been taken through a Confirmation Class by an American minister, Wendell Manuel, who was working in my home parish in 1966. This was his gift to me. It was second-hand when he had it, the inscription in the flyleaf stating it was first purchased in 1957 and had been found by Wendell in a “Used Bookshop, Richmond Virginia” in 1962.

The book is only 135 pages long: prayers for morning and evening for 31 days; a couple of extra Sundays; and a blank page for each day on which can be written personal notes and prayers. The language is, of course, of its time: formal, somewhat archaic, yet profoundly holy and beautiful. Reading it again is an almost transcendent experience, and takes me back to a formative time, when a young American pastor talked with an even younger Scottish lad about the importance of prayer, the beauty of holiness, and the significance of a daily encounter with God.

John Baillie, I thank you. Wendell Manuel, I thank you. Gracie, and Jeannie, and Bette, and George, and Ian, and Morag, and Farquhar, and countless others who have taught me the importance of prayer, in all its forms, I thank you. You will *all* go with me, to help me and heal me, as my journey moves me through Advent to the glory that is to come.

A prayer for today

Companions in prayer – when praying is hard, I'm so pleased you're with me.

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