

FOREWORD

ALMOST FOUR DECADES AGO, THE LATE ROBERT WEBBER gave contemporary Christians two of the greatest summarizing phrases of our faith in those early postmodern, post-Christendom times. He said more and more of us were becoming “evangelicals on the Canterbury trail” and that what we were pursuing was—and is—intimate contact with the “ancient future.”

Webber was right. He was right both descriptively and prophetically. More and more of us have been indeed returning in thought and in practice to the ancient disciplines of the faith, to ways of being that would accompany, compliment, and complete our ways of believing.

The first of the ancient practices to command our attention was fixed-hour prayer . . . or the keeping of the offices . . . or the observing of the divine hours. . . . There are many names for it, but they all refer to the same thing. They all refer to the practice of interrupting secular time every three hours for the observance of worship time made sacred by prayer.

During the mid- to late 1990s, a veritable plethora of prayer manuals was published in the United States and abroad for use, both lay and clergy, both private and corporate, in observing the hours. Robert Benson, long an observer of the hours, compiled one of those manuals, as did I and a number of others who likewise were lifelong practitioners of the discipline.

As interest grew and matured, theologian Scot McKnight gave the twenty-first century another gift by writing *Praying with the Church*, in which he distinguished between praying *in* church and praying *with* the Church. In clear and impassioned detail, McKnight developed the theology and the effectual difference between the two forms of worship.

Now, some five or six years later, Robert Benson returns to the conversation bearing yet another gift. With *In Constant Prayer*, he brings to us the poetry of fixed-hour prayer. In his skilled, vulnerable, gentle hands, the divine hours become not only divinely beautiful, but also totally accessible to every desiring, hungering Christian. What he accomplishes here is no less than the laying bare in beauty of the ancient practice which itself most grants the soul the experience of beauty.

For such as teacher as this, all the Church should be grateful.

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Ancient Practices Series