



Edited by  
ROBYN  
WRIGLEY-CARR

EVELYN  
UNDERHILL'S  
PRAYER  
BOOK

Foreword by  
EUGENE  
PETERSON

‘In the diocese of Chelmsford, we have always treasured our association with Evelyn Underhill and her love for what is now our House of Retreat at Pleshey. It was therefore tremendously exciting to discover her handwritten collection of prayers. This book now makes those prayers available to everyone. To read them and to pray them through is to enter into the heart and experience the spirituality of one of the most significant Christian writers of the twentieth century.’

*Stephen Cottrell, Bishop of Chelmsford*

Prière Simple

& all thy people

**L**ord! make us instruments of thy healing Peace  
 Where there is hate, that we may bring Love.  
 Where there is offence that we may bring Pardon  
 Where there is discord that we may bring Union  
 Where there is error, that we may bring Truth  
 Where there is doubt, that we may bring Faith  
 Where there is despair that we may bring Hope  
 Where there is darkness that we may bring Light  
 Where there is sadness, that we may bring Joy

O Master! make us not such so much  
 To be consoled as to console  
 To be understood, as to understand  
 To be loved, as to love.

For it is in giving that one receives  
 It is in self-forgiveness that one finds  
 It is in pardoning that one is pardoned  
 It is in dying that one makes Eternal Life

attributed to St Francis.

Old French.

EVELYN UNDERHILL'S  
PRAYER BOOK

Edited by Robyn Wrigley-Carr



*To all retreatants  
at the House of Retreat, Pleshey,  
past, present and future*

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## *About the author*

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## *Foreword*

What is the basis of our faith?

The Christian life consists in what God does for us, not what we do for God . . . the Christian life consists in what God says to us, not what we say about God. We also, of course, do things and say things, but if we do not return to Square One each time we act, each time we speak, beginning from God and God's word, we will soon be fond of practising a spirituality that has little to do or nothing to do with God.

And so if we are going truly to live a Christian life and not just use the word 'Christian' to disguise our narcissistic and Promethean attempts at a spirituality without worshipping God and without being addressed by God, it is necessary to return to Square One and adore God and listen to God. Given our sin-damaged memories that render us vulnerable to every latest edition of journalistic spirituality, daily reorientation in the truth revealed in Jesus attested in Scripture is required. And given our ancient predisposition for reducing every scrap of divine revelation that we come across to a piece of moral/spiritual technology that we can use to get on in the world, and eventually to get on with God, we have proven time and time again that we are not to be trusted in these matters. We need to return to Square One for a fresh start as often as every morning, noon and night.

Robyn Wrigley-Carr gives us help in doing this through making accessible the prayers of great women and men from the past, including Evelyn Underhill. This *Prayer Book* enables us each day to reflect, pray and remember who we are and whose we are.

Robyn was my student for years at Regent College in Vancouver, Canada. She was a fine student who took God seriously in her life. It gives me great pleasure to encourage the reader to return to this book daily. It will help you to return to Square One.

*Eugene Peterson*

# *Introduction*

## *Discovering the Prayer Books*

In 2016, I researched the influence of Baron Friedrich von Hügel on Evelyn Underhill, working in several UK archives. I had not planned to visit the Retreat House at Pleshey (near Chelmsford), where Underhill led retreats. However, at the last minute, as a complete afterthought, I went.

In the late afternoon at the Retreat House, I discovered a dark brown, leather-bound volume. It had two bronze clasps, both engraved with a Celtic design. At first it seemed to be locked, but as I opened it I saw it contained red calligraphy headings and a collection of prayers.

Numerous Underhill scholars have alluded to the book of prayers that Underhill used for leading spiritual retreats. Margaret Cropper described ‘a special book of prayers’ that Underhill ‘had collected which went to retreats with her, for she . . . read prayers from this special collection.’<sup>1</sup> In 1990, Grace Adolphsen Brame found some unpublished Underhill retreat talks that repeatedly displayed the initials, ‘P.B.’. Brame assumed they referred to Underhill’s *Prayer Book*, which, she lamented, ‘can no longer be found . . . that little book of prayers which Underhill had made herself, one single copy of hand-written prayers which she loved . . . If that is ever found, it will be a treasure.’<sup>2</sup>

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I wish to acknowledge the Australian Research Theology Foundation Inc. for a grant that enabled me to do this research.

## 2 Introduction

And now this ‘treasure’ that scholars assumed lost decades before was found.

I didn’t know at the time, but this was Underhill’s second *Prayer Book*, dated 1929–38. The handwriting at times is quite illegible. I imagine some of the prayers were scrawled by Underhill in bed, given she stopped leading retreats in 1938, due to ill-health. So how had this *Prayer Book* suddenly re-emerged?

In 2004, the Canadian-born priest Father Bill Kirkpatrick sent this leather-bound *Prayer Book* to the Retreat House at Pleshey. He had bought it many years earlier at an Oxfam bookshop and had greatly benefited from using it for his personal prayers. Kirkpatrick described it as ‘full of . . . good things on the mystery we are all caught up in’.<sup>3</sup> I understand that the Warden at the time had placed this *Prayer Book* in a suitcase for safekeeping, where it lay, forgotten.

So, having stumbled upon this ‘treasure’, I began to copy out the *Prayer Book*, with a clear sense that God had set up this discovery. And as I copied, I sensed that great ‘cloud of witnesses’ Paul describes in Hebrews 12, in an arc above, smiling enthusiastically, cheering me on to do the work of making Underhill’s *Prayer Book* accessible to a new generation.<sup>4</sup> For these prayers were written by lovers of God from different branches of the Church, from the third to the twentieth century. And these prayers had blessed retreatants for decades, until it was mysteriously lost.

A few months later, I returned to Pleshey to check my copied manuscript with the original. To my absolute amazement a second *Prayer Book* had also mysteriously emerged. This was the first *Prayer Book* that Underhill wrote. The yellow and blue, flowery print cover, with light-blue ribbon book mark, was most probably

hand-bound by Underhill. The handwriting is much neater, indicating it as the earlier of the two *Prayer Books*. I would roughly date it as from 1924, when Underhill started taking retreats, until 1928, just before the second *Prayer Book* begins. This earlier *Prayer Book* is 67 pages, whereas the later one is nearly double, at 129 pages.<sup>5</sup> Both *Prayer Books* have the identical, defining feature of usually beginning a prayer with a red, decorative letter in calligraphy. Also, most pages have a heading that relates to the index at the back of each *Prayer Book*. Fifty-five prayers from the first *Prayer Book* are repeated in the second *Prayer Book*. In this edition, I have only provided the prayer in the first instance. Each page of the original *Prayer Books* had a page number for identifying prayers in the indexes. Here I have kept the original page numbers for the prayers for the first *Prayer Book* but have continued the page numbering for the second *Prayer Book* and adapted and combined the indexes into one.<sup>6</sup>

Having outlined the discovery, we now turn to examine two aspects of Underhill's story that are directly relevant to her *Prayer Book*: the influence of Baron Friedrich von Hügel on her choice of prayers, and Underhill's retreat leading – the context in which her *Prayer Books* were used.

### *Underhill's story - von Hügel's influence*

I owe him [von Hügel] my whole spiritual life. (Underhill)<sup>7</sup>

The Catholic layman, Friedrich von Hügel (1852–1925), had a significant influence on Underhill's choice of authors in the *Prayer Book*. But first, a little of Underhill's spiritual narrative before she

came under von Hügel's spiritual nurture, to provide the context for his remarkable influence upon her.

Evelyn Underhill (1875–1941) was raised in a secular home and joined an occult group, the Order of the Golden Dawn, in 1904. She was a member of this group for a few years but writes, this period 'did not last long'.<sup>8</sup> Underhill narrates part of her journey:

For eight or nine years I really believed myself to be an atheist . . . Gradually the net closed in on me and I was driven nearer and nearer to Christianity, half of me wishing it were true, and half resisting violently.<sup>9</sup>

Eventually, after spending a few days at a convent in 1907, Underhill was 'overcome by an overpowering vision' that 'convinced' her 'that the Catholic religion was true'.<sup>10</sup> From that encounter, Underhill was heading for acceptance into the Roman Catholic Church, but her fiancé, Hubert, responded to this prospect with a 'storm of grief, rage and misery'.<sup>11</sup> Hubert's opposition, coupled with the Catholic Modernist crisis, halted Underhill's conversion.

Underhill was confirmed into the Church of England at boarding school, then, in 1921, through von Hügel's influence, she became a practising member of the Anglican Church. Though she resonated with Catholic spirituality, often worshipping in Catholic churches, Underhill stayed an Anglican her entire life.<sup>12</sup> Lord Ramsey, a former Archbishop of Canterbury, suggests that Underhill was one of the few in the Church of England in the 1920s and 1930s who helped people to 'grasp the priority of prayer in the Christian life and the place of the contemplative element within it'.<sup>13</sup> The primary influence on Underhill's grasp of these 'priorities' was von Hügel.

Underhill's life was transformed dramatically through von Hügel's spiritual direction from 1919 until 1925. Evelyn Underhill's close friend, Lucy Menzies, describes the Baron as Evelyn's 'final court of appeal in all things spiritual . . . she drank deeply of his spirit'.<sup>14</sup> Underhill came to the Baron drifting spiritually with an abstracted sense of the mystical life. Through von Hügel's influence, Underhill came to encounter Christ, describing this experience vividly:

Until about five years ago I never had any personal experience of our Lord. I didn't know what it meant . . . Somehow by his prayers, or something, he [von Hügel] compelled me to experience Christ. He never said anything more about it – but I know humanly speaking he did it. It took about four months – it was like watching the sun rise very slowly – and then suddenly one knew what it was.<sup>15</sup>

In addition to this Christocentric influence, von Hügel encouraged Underhill to the Institutional Element.<sup>16</sup> He described Underhill as needing 'de-intellectualizing', having too much blood lodged in her brain.<sup>17</sup> He wanted to balance her intellectual focus with the institutional: care for the poor, church attendance, partaking in the Eucharist.

Von Hügel also had a profound impact on Underhill through the authors he encouraged her to read. The Baron always recommended his spiritual directees engage in 15 minutes of daily 'spiritual reading', which he described as like having 'a lozenge melt imperceptively in your mouth'.<sup>18</sup> The words of these spiritual writings were to be savoured and prayed, not simply read with the head and lodged in the mind. He wanted significant, spiritual insights

to disperse into the bloodstream and be assimilated into the *whole* person.

Von Hügel's influence on Underhill's choice of authors in her *Prayer Books* is significant. The most obvious imprint is displayed through *The Imitation of Christ* being the text most quoted in Underhill's *Prayer Books*. This book was von Hügel's 'staple spiritual food';<sup>19</sup> the words he encouraged his directees to 'work into' their lives.<sup>20</sup> In addition, Augustine's *Confessions*<sup>21</sup> is quoted in Underhill's *Prayer Books*. Von Hügel tried to 'live' this book, 'at its deepest', for 50 years.<sup>22</sup>

Other authors that von Hügel repeatedly recommended for spiritual reading are also quoted in Underhill's *Prayer Book*. These include Pere Grou,<sup>23</sup> François Fénelon,<sup>24</sup> Francis de Sales,<sup>25</sup> Teresa of Avila and John of the Cross,<sup>26</sup> Jean Pierre de Caussade<sup>27</sup> and Élisabeth Leseur.<sup>28</sup> Underhill also includes Scripture in her *Prayer Books*, particularly the Psalms.<sup>29</sup> The Baron had recommended that his directees pray the psalms because of their 'richness, reality [and] penetrating spirituality'.<sup>30</sup>

Though we clearly recognize the Baron's influence on some of the authors that Underhill selected, she chose the specific prayers herself. Charles Williams tells us that 'each new prayer had to be on probation for some time before she admitted it to her collection'.<sup>31</sup>

### *Authors of the selected prayers*

In the earlier, flowery-covered *Prayer Book* most of the prayers are quotations that Underhill selected from great men and women of prayer, through the centuries, from all branches of the Christian Church. On the back of the page, Underhill provides her own short prayers. But by the second half of the later, leather-bound *Prayer*

*Book* the majority of the long prayers are written by Underhill herself. Throughout the *Prayer Book*, if no author's name is stated, the prayer is written by Underhill.

Underhill's *Prayer Books* include authors from the third to the twentieth centuries, with the greatest concentration of authors from the sixteenth century. Short biographies of each author plus information about the church liturgies Underhill draws upon are provided in this volume in the section 'Author biographies and liturgical sources'. The authors included are:

<b>Third century</b>	Augustine
<b>Fourth century</b>	Ambrose
<b>Sixth century</b>	Pope Gregory VII
<b>Eighth century</b>	Alcuin of York, Rabia al-Basri
<b>Ninth century</b>	John Scotus Eriugena
<b>Tenth century</b>	Æthelwold of Winchester
<b>Eleventh century</b>	Anselm
<b>Twelfth century</b>	Francis of Assisi
<b>Thirteenth century</b>	Richard Rolle, John of Ruysbroeck, Thomas Aquinas
<b>Fifteenth century</b>	Ignatius of Loyola, Nicholas of Cusa
<b>Sixteenth century</b>	Teresa of Avila, Launcelot Andrewes, Pierre de Bérulle, John Donne, Frances de Chantal, John Bradford, Luis de Leon, Sir Francis Drake
<b>Seventeenth century</b>	Gertrude More, Bishop Thomas Ken, Jean Pierre de Caussade, Jeremy Taylor, William Law, John Eudes

**Nineteenth century** John Henry Newman, Edward Pusey, Father Baker, James Martineau, Christina Rossetti, Janet Erskine Stuart, Ottokár Prohászka

**Twentieth century** Margaret Cropper, Edward Keble Talbot

Only four centuries have no authors represented. As well as Anglicans, Roman Catholics and Orthodox writers, Underhill includes a Sufi mystic. The enormous diversity in Underhill's choice of liturgies also displays her eclectic, wide reading and knowledge of different branches of the Church.

In addition to prayers from historical saints, Underhill had her close friend, Sorella Maria di Campello, contribute to the *Prayer Book*, as translated at 120 (page 88).<sup>32</sup> We also have two small contributions from Underhill's friend, Marjorie Vernon, her nurse during her final years.<sup>33</sup>

We now turn to discuss the context for the use of these specially selected prayers.

### *Underhill's retreat leading*

Underhill went on her first retreat at Pleshey in 1922. She recalls her 'alarm at the idea of silence, and the mysterious peace and light distilled by it' and her 'absolute distress when it ended, and clatter began'.<sup>34</sup> By June 1923, she would declare to Lucy Menzies, 'The retreat house I always go to is Pleshey',<sup>35</sup> which became '*my dear Pleshey*'.<sup>36</sup> For Pleshey is 'steeped . . . in centuries of prayer and adoration . . . full of Life and Light'.<sup>37</sup>

When asked to take a Pleshey retreat in 1924, Underhill's 'whole face lit up, and she said that to conduct a retreat was something she had longed to do'.<sup>38</sup> It was new for the Church of England to have a woman leading retreats and Underhill was a pioneer in this work.<sup>39</sup> As T. S. Eliot states, 'With shrewdness and simplicity she helped to support the spiritual life of many.'<sup>40</sup> For over a decade, Underhill led retreats at Pleshey and at other locations, such as Moreton, Leiston Abbey, Glastonbury and Little Compton.<sup>41</sup> Some years she led as many as seven or eight retreats, always with two of these at Pleshey. She used the same material for all of the retreats in one calendar year.<sup>42</sup> Her books in the last 15 years of her life were based on these yearly retreat talks.

At her retreats Underhill gave both addresses and meditations. A guided meditation was generally given at midday on the Saturday or Sunday. These meditations focused on a passage or event in Scripture as material for prayer.<sup>43</sup> Underhill's addresses were given daily at 10.00 a.m., 5.00 p.m. and 8.30 p.m. For her addresses, Underhill always had an overriding metaphor, as evident in her published retreat addresses, for example, *The House of the Soul* (1926), *The Mount of Purification* (1931), *The Light of Christ* (1932), *Abba* (1934), *The Mystery of Sacrifice* (1935) and *The Fruits of the Spirit* (1936).

Underhill usually arrived a day early to Pleshey to prepare. She placed a keynote quotation or a visual stimulus on the noticeboard in the chapel before her retreats. At the chapel porch she put up 'suggestions for Bible readings, Points for Meditation, times for interviews, the Hymn Sheet . . .'.<sup>44</sup> Underhill chose all the hymns and led prayers and the Eucharist at 12.30 p.m. daily. A time of

rest and recreation was allowed from 2.00 p.m. until 4.30 p.m. each day. Underhill always had intercessors praying for each retreat, whose names were given on the final night.<sup>45</sup> Underhill preferred a small group at her retreats, so that she was able to offer ‘interviews’ (spiritual direction) twice daily, in the conductor’s sitting room.

The *Prayer Book* was crucial to each retreat as it contained the prayers that Underhill read during times of worship in the Pleshey chapel. Underhill’s *Prayer Books* were working documents as she adapted existing prayers to fit in with the themes of specific retreats. In the originals of the *Prayer Books*, we see the different fountain pens and pencils used on the same piece of text, indicating revisions and additions at different times. For example, in prayer 94, the original word is changed to ‘peace’, and the heading ‘patience’ is added, presumably to make it more suitable for Underhill’s ‘Fruit of the Spirit’ retreat in 1935. In this publication of the *Prayer Books*, I have provided the most recent changes, stating in the notes where earlier options for particular wording are provided in the original manuscripts. The *Prayer Book* indexes were also added gradually, as revealed through the final page of the second *Prayer Book* index being out of alphabetical order. Another observation is that Underhill did not always fill each page in a sequential way. Throughout the *Prayer Books* we find blank pages here and there, indicating that any particular page could be written upon at random.

I hope that these prayers enrich both your personal life and your involvement in corporate prayer.<sup>46</sup>

Robyn Wrigley-Carr

## *Evelyn Underhill's* Book of Private Prayers<sup>1</sup>

1

Our Father  
in heaven,  
Hallowed be Your name;  
Your kingdom come;  
Your will be done;  
In earth as it is in heaven.  
Give us this day our daily bread.  
And forgive us our trespasses,  
As we forgive them that trespass against us.  
And lead us not into temptation;  
But deliver us from evil:  
For Yours is the kingdom,  
The power, and the glory,  
For ever and ever, Amen.

Let us ask for a closer communion with our Lord.<sup>2</sup>

2

### **Communion with God**

O Lord (who shall) grant unto us now to find You alone, that we may open to You our hearts and enjoy You as our souls desire. When You alone shall speak to us, and we to You, good Lord;

as one friend is accustomed to speak to another secretly. This we desire and pray Lord Jesus, that we may be fully drawn<sup>3</sup> to You, gathered wholly in You and utterly forgetting ourselves. That You might be with us,<sup>4</sup> and we with You, and thus assembled make us ever to dwell together, we pray.<sup>5</sup> (*Imitation* IV.13)

### 3

#### **God's love**

O Lord, how great is the multitude of Your sweetness to them that fear You. But what are You to those that love You? What to them that serve You with all their hearts? The sweetness of the contemplation that You grant to those that love You is unspeakable. Here You show most fully the sweetness of Your charity: that when we were not, You made us, and when we erred from You, You led us again to serve You, and You commanded us to love You. How can we forget, since You remembered us? Even when we failed, You were merciful to Your servants, and have shown us grace and friendship above all our deserts. (*Imitation* III.2)

Let us pray for the graces of fortitude and perseverance.

Let us ask that the healing and strength and power of God may come into our souls.

### 4

#### **Grace**

We bless You, heavenly Father, Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, because You remember us. When You come into our hearts, we

are filled with Your joy. You are our glory, the exultation of our hearts; You are our hope and refuge in the day of trouble. But because we are feeble in love and imperfect in virtue, therefore we need to be strengthened by You. Therefore visit us, Lord, oft times; and instruct us with holy discipline. Deliver us from our evil passions and heal our hearts from all wrongful affections: that we, inwardly healed and well purified, may be able to love, strong to suffer, steady to persevere. *(Imitation III.6)*

Let us ask for grace to do the will of God.

## 5

### **God's will**

Most merciful Jesus, grant us Your grace that it may be with us and work with us and abide with us to the end. Grant us ever to do Your will and to desire that which is most acceptable to You and most dearly pleases You. May Your will be our will, and may our will ever follow Your will and agree to it in all things. Be there in us one willing and one not willing with You; and let us will nothing but what You will. Grant us for Your sake to love to be despised and unknown in the world. (Grant us, above all things, desire to rest in You and to poise our souls in You.) You are the very peace of heart; You are our only rest, without You all things are hard and unquiet. So that our wills be right and abide steadfast in You, do to us in all things that please You; for it may not be but good, whatsoever You do to us. If You will that we be in light, blessed may You be; if You will that we be in darkness, blessed may You be. Give us grace gladly to suffer for You whatever You will shall come upon

us. May we indifferently receive of Your hand good and evil, bitter and sweet, glad and sorrowful; and for all things that befall us, give thanks to You. *(Imitation III.17, 19)*

## 6

### **Transformation**

Make us like Yourself, O God, since in spite of ourselves, such You can make us. You have shown it to be possible in the face of the whole world by the most overwhelming proof, by taking our created nature on Yourself and exalting it to You. Let us have in our own person what in Jesus You have given to our nature. Let us be partakers of that divine nature. Enter our hearts substantially and personally, filling them with You. (J. H. Newman)

## 7

### **Protection**

To You are our eyes directed, O God, Father of mercies. Bless and sanctify our souls with a heavenly blessing, that they may be Your holy habitation and nothing may be found in the temple of Your honour that may offend the eyes of Your Majesty.

Look upon us according to the greatness of Your goodness and the multitude of Your pities. Defend and keep the souls of Your little servants among so many perils of this corruptible life: and, Your grace going with us, direct us by the way of peace to the country of everlasting clearness. *(Imitation III.64)*

Let us commit ourselves to our Lord's guidance.

8

**The true pilot**

O Christ who are a most true pilot and guide, and also most expert, faithful and friendly, put out Your hand, open our eyes, make Your high way known to us which You first entered into. You are the way: lead us to the Father by Yourself, that we all may be one with Him as You and He together be one. Show us the way we should walk in, for we lift up our souls unto You. (H. B., 1566)

**Joy**

Good Lord, give us joyfulness of heart and peace of conscience; continual gladness and consolation in Your word and promises; that we may evermore be thankful unto You and praise Your name for ever.

Let us renew our personal consecration to Our Lord.

9

**O Master Christ**

You have loved us with an everlasting love:  
You have forgiven us, trained us, disciplined us:  
You have broken us loose and laid Your commands on us:  
You have set us in the thick of things and deigned to use us:  
You have shown Yourself to us, fed us, guided us.  
Be graciously pleased to accept and forgive our poor efforts,  
And keep us Your free bond slaves for ever.

Let us ask God's help in the reordering of our lives.

## 10

### **Mortification**

O God, it is true that self-subjection frightens the cowardly; who are thus because, counting on themselves, they lack confidence in You. Thus have we been until now; but we desire no longer so to be. We are resolved to attack in ourselves all that You show us to be contrary to Your love. You know the measure of love and holiness You await from each one of us; we cannot fulfil it without an equal measure of renunciation. We have made our choice; but we can do nothing without You. Help us; strengthen us. We begin very late; make up for all our wasted years. You can do it, You will to do it; it will be our fault if You do not do it, and we shall have to reproach ourselves with having failed to love You in time, and with failing to love You in eternity, as much as You desire and as we ought to do.

(J. N. Grou)

Let us ask for an increase and deepening of our faith.

## 11

### **Eriugena**

God our salvation and redemption, who has given us nature, give us also grace. Manifest Your light to us, feeling after You and seeking You in the shades of ignorance. Recall us from our errors. Stretch out Your right hand to us weak ones, who cannot without You, come to You. Show Yourself to those who seek nothing beside You. Break the clouds of vain imaginations, which suffer not the eye of the mind to behold You in that way in which You permit