

FROM THE ANGLICAN PATRIMONY

There is one thing still remaining, that you must be required to observe, not only as fit and proper to be done, but as such as cannot be neglected without great prejudice to your devotions: and that is to begin all your prayers with a psalm.

This is so right, is so beneficial to devotion, has so much effect upon our hearts, that it may be insisted upon as a common rule for all persons. I do not mean, that you should read over a psalm, but that you should chant or sing one of those psalms, which we commonly call the reading psalms. For singing is as much the proper use of a psalm as devout supplication is the proper use of a form of prayer; and a psalm only read is very much like a prayer that is only looked over.

Now the method of chanting a psalm, such as is used in the colleges, in the universities, and in some churches, is such as all persons are capable of. The change of the voice in thus chanting of a psalm is so small and natural, that everybody is able to do it, and yet sufficient to raise and keep up the gladness of our hearts.

You are, therefore, to consider this chanting of a psalm as a necessary beginning of your devotions, as something that is to awaken all that is good and holy within you, that is to call your spirits to their proper duty, to set you in your best posture towards heaven, and tune all the powers of your soul to worship and adoration.

William Law

A Serious Call to a Devout and Holy Life, Chapter XV

William Law (1686–1761) was a Nonjuror clergyman, who was deprived of his position at Cambridge University in 1714 when he refused to take the oath of allegiance to George I and to abjure the Stuart dynasty. For many years he was tutor in the household of Edward Gibbon, grandfather of the famous historian of the Roman Empire. He eventually retired to a small country home inherited from his father. His Serious Call is only one of many of his works. It exerted a far-ranging influence on many English Christians, including the John and Charles Wesley. An online version of his most famous work can be found at the Christian Classics Ethereal Library: http://www.ccel.org/ccel/law/serious_call.html.