

Prayer of the Month • September 2010

O Holy Spirit, giver of light and life,
impart to us thoughts better than our own thoughts,
and prayers better than our own prayers,
and powers better than our own powers,
that we may spend and be spent
in the ways of love and goodness,
after the perfect image of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

Eric Milner-White and G. W. Briggs, *Daily Prayer* (1941)

This prayer has found its way into the 'Other Prayers' section of *Common Worship Daily Prayer* (p.409), a small section of prayers that is well worth using. Prayers used in liturgy are like pebbles on a beach. They have a unique source of origin, but then they are worn and polished over time by repeated use and tiny changes. This one is credited with coming from a collection written and compiled by Eric Milner-White and G. W. Briggs and published in 1941, called *Daily Prayer*. It takes the form of a collect and packs a lot into a few lines. Unusually for a prayer, it is addressed directly to the Holy Spirit, but this seems very appropriate because it is a prayer for inspiration, using the phrase 'impart to us'. It is a prayer not only for inspiration but of aspiration, seeking a better way than we can know by our own efforts. It is a prayer for usefulness in the cause of good, and all directed in imitation of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Eric Milner-White was educated at Harrow and King's College, Cambridge, a college he served for thirty-two years. While Dean there he introduced the now-famous service of nine lessons and carols for Christmas. He later became Dean of York Minister, and, when there created an Epiphany Procession and a Harvest Festival. He was involved in a panel for a new translation of the Bible, as well as in church music and the arts. He published several other books, including *A Procession of Passion Prayers* (1951). He died in 1963.

G. W. Briggs is probably best known today for his hymns – he was for over thirty years editor with Ralph Vaughan-Williams and Martin Shaw (and Percy Dearmer until his death in 1938) of *Services and Hymns for Schools*. He was ordained in 1899, becoming a curate in an industrial parish near Wakefield, then becoming a chaplain in the navy, then Vicar of St Andrew's, Norwich, followed by Rector of Loughborough in 1918. In 1934 he became a Canon Residentiary of Worcester Cathedral, and was Vice Dean from 1944 until 1955 when he reached the age of 80. He died in 1959.

Colin Lunt