



Christian Prayer For Today, Frank Whaling, Edinburgh: Saint Andrew Press, 2002, ISBN 0 7152 0765 2, pp. 207, Pb. £7.99

“Another book of prayers,” I thought as I settled down to read Frank Whaling’s ‘Christian Prayer For Today.’ I was quite happy about that, because I enjoy reading other peoples’ prayers. So I missed out all the introductory words and dived in immediately to the prayers themselves only to discover that this is no ordinary collection. It is decidedly not a collection of prayers to be used in services of worship, all neatly set out as an assistance to busy parish ministers thinking about a rapidly approaching Sunday morning; it is a far more important book than that. I was immediately struck by its similarity to Leslie Weatherhead’s wonderful ‘Private House of Prayer’ with several ‘prayer rooms’ for each day of a month, to which Whaling acknowledges his indebtedness.

Here there are no ‘rooms’, but there is a cycle of prayer for each day of the week and for four weeks in all. (I did find it strange that each week ended with Sunday.) Each day starts with Approach (a short scripture verse) and moves through Praise, Thanks, Self-Examination and Forgiveness, Meditation, petition, Prayer for Action and ending with another short verse to contemplate during the rest of the day.

In part the book is an anthology, bringing together the best of material from a spectrum of religious thought and in part it includes the thoughts and insights of the author himself. With strong memories of the ‘meditation room’ in Weatherhead’s book still in my mind after so many years since I last read it, I turned to Whaling’s meditations to see if they would be equally high points in his offering: I wasn’t disappointed. Some are straight forward meditations on often familiar Biblical passages – Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego’s statement of faith on the verge of the blazing furnace – or thoughts on a familiar passage in Romans – ‘Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?’ Others take us into the stories and experience of Jesus. In a moving meditation on the Good Samaritan, Whaling retells the story from the stand-point of the traveller and guides his readers’ thoughts to refugees: ‘O God, what have I done to be so alone and so forlorn in this world!’

As he thinks about Jesus at the Pool of Bethesda, Whaling imagines himself present as Jesus meets the paralysed man and the experience changes him too as he, and we, realised that we also are in need of the wholeness which only Jesus can give.

The four week cycle starts by directing our thoughts to prayer itself and builds to a meditation on the words from the Cross, to the challenge of discipleship and a final resting place in the all-importance of love: 'Love is the greatest thing in the world.' 'Let us therefore treasure love, and treasure God. For where our treasure is, there our heart is also', and ends with a prayer for action drawn from John Wesley's 'The Portrait of a Christian.' All that is left is to invite his reader to contemplate the fact that 'God is love' before the cycle starts once more.

Now I turned to the introduction. I had realised that Whaling was a Methodist by reading his prayers; now I learned more of his interesting life, how he came to faith, those who influenced his life and the matters which became important to him. He shares his views as to why people today are reluctant to pray and discussed what he has learned from experience in India, from his study of the Wesleys and of C.J. Jung, leading to a challenge to his readers to engage in a daily pattern of prayer for which his book is offered as an introductory tool. It will be one which is welcomed and appreciated by many.

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God in Society: Doing Social Theology in Scotland, eds. W. Storrar and Peter Donald, Edinburgh: Saint Andrew Press, 2003. ISBN 0715208039. pp 232. £17.99

This is an important and welcome book that attempts to map some of the contours of what would comprise an authentic and responsible social theology in Scotland today. It originates in a series of talks and meetings of the Centre for Theology and Public Issues in New College, Edinburgh and it is published in honour of Andrew Morton, the Associate Director