

Values, Philosophy and Religious Studies.....

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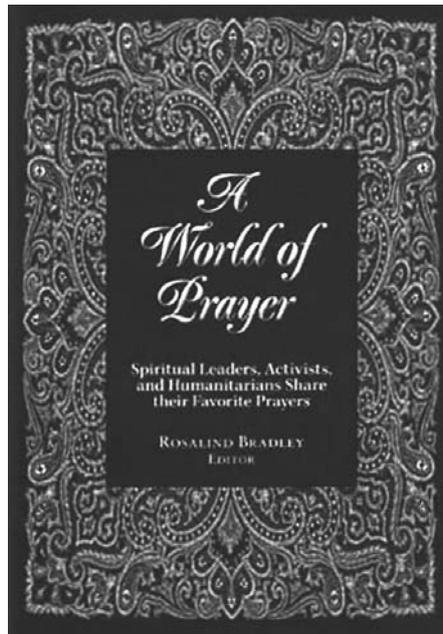
***Book Review – A World of Prayer: Spiritual Leaders, Activists and Humanitarians Share their Favourite Prayers.* Orbis Books, Maryknoll, New York 2012**

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In July 2005, four home-grown terrorists detonated bombs on the London Underground and in a double-decker bus. Fifty-two people were killed; hundreds injured. Rosalind Bradley was staying in London at the time. She knew that her response had to have something to do with prayer. Returning to Australia, she wrote to 450 prominent people inviting them to share spiritual resources. 165 people responded and the result was a beautiful book called *Mosaic: Favourite Prayers and reflections from Inspiring Australians*. It was published by Harper Collins. Men and women from a variety of backgrounds and faiths contributed to *Mosaic*. In collecting material for the book, Rosalind aimed to build bridges, foster mutual respect and assist in the "dialogue of living" in Australia's multicultural and spiritually diverse society. It's a little gem. I have often used it in class and for chapel services.

Rosalind has edited a new collection entitled *A World of Prayer: Spiritual Leaders, Activists and Humanitarians Share their Favourite Prayers*. It is published by Orbis Books. Orbis endeavors to publish works that enlighten the mind, nourish the spirit, and challenge the conscience. They seek to explore the global dimensions of Christian faith and mission, to invite dialogue with diverse cultures and religious traditions, and serve the cause of reconciliation and peace. Again with this collection, more than one hundred people from a very wide background responded. They most often contributed a favourite prayer, sometimes simply a scriptural text or a poem and almost always added some insightful remarks about the choice they made. These remarks are fascinating and add great depth to the book.

Prayers, texts and insights are from Bahaiis, Brahma Kumaris, Buddhists, Christians, Hindus, Jews, Muslims, Sikhs and Taoists. We hear from men and women in Rwanda, Kenya, Nigeria, Turkey, The United Kingdom, El Salvador, the United States, New Zealand,



Australia, Papua New Guinea, Nicaragua, Israel, Cambodia, the Philippines, Syria, Mali, Thailand, Pakistan, India, Samoa, Japan, United Arab Emirates, Germany, Korea, Ireland, South Africa, Denmark, Malaysia, France, Burma, Switzerland, Norway, Peru, Costa Rica, Bhutan, Norway, Greece, Indonesia, Poland, Haiti, China and Afghanistan.

The first prayer, which is included as a sort of epigraph to the collection, is from Hazrat Inayat Khan who founded the Sufi Order of the West in London in 1914. His message of divine unity (Tawid) focuses on the themes of love, harmony and beauty. Khan taught that blind adherence to any book rendered religion void of spirit. He wrote:

**Your light is in all forms,
Your love in all beings.
Allow us to recognize You
In all Your holy names and forms.**

Five Nobel Peace Prize laureates have made contributions. His Holiness, The Dalai Lama selected the following from the 8th century Buddhist scholar Shantideva:

For as long as space endures,
And for as long as living beings remain,
Until then may I, too, abide,
To dispel the misery of the world.

The Dalai Lama's remarks are brief: "I say this prayer daily because it gives me great inspiration and determination." It is profoundly simple and it is enough.

Mairead Corrigan Maguire was awarded the 1976 Nobel Peace Prize. She selected the Prayer of St Francis. Sogyal Rinpoche, author of *The Tibetan Book of Living and Dying*, chose two pieces. The first was that chosen by the Dalai Lama and the second that selected by Mairead Corrigan Maguire. Sogyal Rinpoche writes:

I have chosen these prayers because they capture the essence of love, compassion and altruism that lie at the heart of all the great spiritual traditions. The words from these two great traditions, one Buddhist and one Christian, seem to come from the same source and convey the enactment of compassion at the most profound level. The most powerful prayers are the ones that touch, inspire and bring out the best in us, the goodness that we all have, as Buddhists call it bodhichitta, or the heart of the enlightened mind. If we can truly embody the meaning of these great prayers, we can bring such benefit both to ourselves and to others.

I can't help but feel that he has captured in his comments the very vision that was Rosalind Bradley's when she edited both *Mosaic* and *A World of Prayer*.

I was particularly taken by the contribution of James Alison. Alison is a Catholic priest and theologian. In writing theology and in lecturing around the world, he draws on the work of the French historian, literary critic and philosopher, Rene Girard. James Alison is known for his firm but gentle persistence in

promoting dialogue and understanding in the Church regarding homosexuality. He quotes from Teresa of Avila. You can read the Spanish version in the book. The following is his own liberal, rather than literal translation.

May nothing wind you up,
Nothing affright you;
Everything comes and goes
God, still, just there;
Through patience
All will be achieved.
If you have God,
You lack nothing:
God alone will do.

Alison describes himself as "someone who lives with a deep sense of panic just below the surface of things." He is driven to agitation by any crowd and finds Teresa's pithy call back to God very comforting.

There are several selections from the Qur'an. Amina Wadud is an academic who focuses on feminist scholarship, Sufism and activism for gender sensitive policy reforms as they relate to the lives of Muslim women. She chose a passage that asks God not to demand too much of us.

Do not place a burden upon us like you
You placed
upon others before us
Our Lord: Do not place upon us what we
cannot endure
Pardon us.

(Qur'an 2: 286)

Tariq Ramadan, Professor of Contemporary Islamic Studies at Oxford, opted for a few lines from the Al-Bukhari Collection of prophetic traditions:

O God, we ask you to provide us with
God-
consciousness, human detachment,
spiritual
richness and love of the poor.

Zainab Salbi is the author of *Between Two Worlds: Escape from Tyranny: Growing up in the Shadow of Saddam*. She founded *Women for Women International*, a humanitarian organisation that helps women survivors of wars rebuild their lives. She has two quotes from Jalal al-Din Rumi. The first includes these words:

Out beyond the ideas of wrongdoing and
rightdoing,
There is a field. I'll meet you there.

Zainib believes in the oneness of humanity and the power of joy:

It is joy that makes me grateful for all I
have been through and all that I have
become and may still become. It is with
joy that I choose to live.

Deborah Weissman is the first Jewish woman to be elected president of the International Council of Christians and Jews. She chose some lines from the Unetaneh Tokef, a liturgical poem from the Middle Ages. She remarks: "May we all recognize the preciousness and precariousness of everyday life."

Christina Rees looks to Julian of Norwich. Rowan Williams quotes from an old Lutheran hymn "Schmucke dich o liebe Seele" by Johann Franck. The Archbishop prays these words every day. Kirsty Sword Gusmao selects a Taoist meditation. Miriam-Rose Ununmerr-Baumann, teacher, artist and writer from Daly River community in the Northern Territory has written her own reflection on inner, deep listening and quiet, still awareness. She writes:

There are deep springs within each of us.
Within this deep spring, which is the very
spirit of God, is a sound. The sound of
Deep calling to Deep.

Contributors include Brother Alois, Prior of Taizé, Robina Courtin, founder of Liberation Prison Project, Zoya Phan a Burmese human rights activist and Dr Sunitha Krishnan, an anti-trafficking campaigner in India. Others are Archbishop Elias Chacour, Nelson Mandela, Lech Walesa, Desmond Tutu, Richard Rohr, Joan Chittister, Timothy Radcliffe, Sheila Cassidy and Swami Niranjan Sarawati.

"Blasts from the past" include Daniel Berrigan SJ, Pete Seeger and Canon Paul Oestreicher.

People used to talk about the Church of England as the Tory Party at Prayer. This collection is more like the Greens in meditation and mindfulness. Indeed, Elizabeth May, an Anglican who is leader of the Green Party in Canada, has picked out some lines from E.F. Schumacher, author of *Small Is Beautiful*.

I love this book and thoroughly recommend it. It is full of great riches from people who are trying to make the world a better place, and whose spirituality comes out of an extraordinary variety of religious experience within so many traditions.

"God of life

Every act of violence
Between myself and others
Destroys a part of your creation

Stir in my heart
A renewed sense of reverence
For all life

Give me vision to recognize your spirit
In every human being,
However they behave towards me

Make possible the impossible
By cultivating in me
The fertile seed of healing love

May I play my part
In breaking the cycle of violence
By realizing that
Peace begins with me."

— The team at St. Elthelburga's Centre
for Reconciliation and Peace

Many readers will be familiar with Stephen Prothero's book *God Is Not One: The Eight Rival Religions that Run the World – and Why Their Differences Matter*. It's a work that makes a fresh and provocative argument that, contrary to much popular understanding, all religions are not simply "different paths to the same God." Prothero asks us to consider the uniqueness of each religion, and to acknowledge that they ask different questions, tackle different problems and aim at different goals. On the other hand, many will be familiar with Karen Armstrong's *Charter for Compassion*, a document which urges the peoples and religions of the world to embrace the core value of compassion which she believes is found in every religion. *A World of Prayer* is closer to Karen Armstrong than to Stephen Prothero. It is well worth having all three on your shelf.

A final word goes to the renowned surgeon Professor Chris O'Brien, who died in 2009 after a long and valiant struggle with a brain tumour. He had helped many people as they faced cancer. During his own illness, Professor O'Brien received a visit from the then Prime Minister, Kevin Rudd, who presented him with some rosary beads that had been blessed and given to him by Pope Benedict XVI. Chris O'Brien had agreed to contribute to *A World of Prayer* and he chose the Hail Mary.

Chris' wife, Gail O'Brien, wrote and submitted the prayer after his death.

Hail Mary, full of grace,
The Lord is with thee,
Blessed are thou amongst women,
And blessed is the fruit of thy womb,
Jesus.
Holy Mary, Mother of God,
Pray for us sinners now
And at the hour of our death.
Amen.

For a full list of contributors and to order *A World Of Prayer* see: <http://rosbradley.com/aworldofprayer/book.htm>

Profits from this book will go to St. Ethelburga's Centre for Reconciliation and Peace based in London.

Reviewed by Canon Frank Sheehan

Director Ethics Centre
Christ Church Grammar School, Perth



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