Prayer Life. How your personality affects the way you pray  
Pablo Martinez  
Paternoster Press 2001  
£7.99 Pb 156pp  
ISBN 1 85778 436 1

‘I would like my readers to think of prayer without guilt…prayer should not be just one more burden in life, but a pleasure to enjoy’ writes Pablo Martinez in his introduction. His book goes a long way towards meeting this aim.

Combining his psychiatric training and experience as a pastor, Martinez explores why people with different personalities pray in different ways. Personality types are categorised using two axes to represent four psychological functions: thinking-feeling and sensation-intuition. A primary and auxiliary function can be identified (one from each axis), giving eight types, which are then divided by the extrovert/introvert classification. As Martinez describes the different types, it is easy to identify with them and consider the various pitfalls and strengths of your temperament.

This approach helps alleviate the guilt that many feel about the way they pray (or fail to pray), a feeling that is often augmented by comparisons with others’ prayer lives. Martinez urges us to be more accepting of others and ourselves: ‘We are not required to like our temperament, but to work through it for God’s glory in our lives’, and allow others to do likewise. However, Martinez also offers guidance to help us develop in prayer; having identified our areas of weakness, we are better equipped to overcome them.

He moves on to explore the therapeutic value of prayer. In the last section of the book he provides a defence of Christian prayer against the charge that it is mere auto-suggestion, or no different from Eastern meditation.

John Stott has written in the foreword to this book, ‘Here is a psychiatrist who is committed to Christ, knows his Bible, rejoices in Christ’s cross, has a lively sympathy for struggling Christians and has much wisdom born of rich pastoral experience…I cannot imagine any reader failing to be helped by it, as I have been myself.’ This book is warmly recommended for personal reading, practice library and passing on to Christian patients or church members.

Peter Pattisson is ICMDA Regional Secretary for Europe and the former USSR

Prayers for healing: A Burrswood companion  
Michael Fulljames and Michael Harper  
Canterbury Press, Norwich 2003  
£9.99 Pb 141 pp  
ISBN 1 85311 503 7

After many years of experience at the Burrswood Christian Centre for Health Care and Ministry, the authors of this little book offer a series of morning meditations with relevant evening prayers to cover 31 days. As chaplain and doctor, their collaboration typifies the Burrswood aim for spiritual and medical care to go together when facing the mystery of healing and suffering. Situated near Tunbridge Wells, Burrswood is an independent hospital and outpatients’ department that offers a variety of services including rehabilitation, counselling and palliative care, as well as Christian worship and healing.

We are taken through the sometimes raw emotions experienced by many sufferers at the onset of a disorder, or when awaiting diagnosis and prognosis, both favourable and fatal. A doctor’s helpful or hurtful attitude is also made a matter for praise or prayer. Whatever the expected outcome, the sufferer is encouraged to move towards total trust in the God who, through the cross, has identified with human suffering and is able to use it to bring about wholeness of spirit.

There is no unrealistic insistence that healing and cure must go together, so different prayers express fear and acceptance of death as well as gratitude for recovery. Illness can produce many mood swings, yet not everyone experiences them all. If read by a sick person, this book would therefore be most helpful used selectively rather than sequentially. Alternatively hospital chaplains (or others) could mix and match to suit particular needs.

The many relevant marginal annotations and references said more to me than some of the prayers and meditations themselves, yet these are for use by the sick, not the healthy. The authors’ intention is to speak ‘the common language of suffering’, used here to express their own reactions to personal affliction and to convey how others have felt in theirs. It is, therefore, a helpful exercise for any health worker to listen to such messages, realising afresh that in times of trouble God is there, ready to be a very present help and healer.

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Curing the heart - a model for biblical counseling  
Howard Eyrich and William Hines  
Christian Focus Publications 2002  
US$15.99 Pb 204pp  
ISBN 1 85792 722 2

‘Biblical Counseling’ (sic) is greatly influenced by Jay Adams, founder of ‘nouthetic’ counseling, which has core principles of ‘confrontation, concern and change’. The ‘cure’ in this model is not necessarily to reach a stage of ‘feeling better’ (p58), as ‘the chief problem to be dealt with is a severed relationship with God’. The primary goal is therefore ‘for people to become more Christ-like’ (p157), not to ‘rebuild a… wounded personality’ nor to ‘help [clients] perceive themselves as a person having worth’(p162).

Eyrich and Hines outline two premises. Firstly, the root of the ‘counselor’s problems is sin. Secondly, Scripture is sufficient to deal with all problems. The only reference to persecution relates to the counselor rejected by a client. One of the flaws of this approach is the risk of our shortfalls becoming red herrings in the counseling process. Proverbs 30:6 is used to warn against adding to God’s Word ‘with other traditions or modern theories’. I would suggest, however, that common
grace allows even secular studies to contain gems of knowledge about how we tick. A checklist of problems given in a form to be worked through with a client seems arbitrary and haphazard, and problems ‘with a physiological cause’ are to be taken ‘elsewhere’, although there is no guidance as to which symptoms might suggest a physiological cause. The ‘homework’ task recommended for depression, would be near impossible for anyone with an affective disorder.

This guide is poorly structured, wearisomely repetitive and contains such mind-numbing statements as ‘the age of the counselee can be an important indicator of the person’s maturity or lack of maturity’. I agree that ‘obedience and true discipleship must come before happiness’ and that the challenge to choose to have an abortion or to have your baby.’ Yet this appears to run contrary to the author’s stated view that abortion conflicts with ‘Christian morality and principles’ (p191) and his use of the example of the misuse of abortion legislation when he argues against legalising euthanasia (p114). It is clear that he does not advocate abortion; it is just a pity that he hasn’t stated this more clearly.

It would be unfair to write this book off on the basis of a CMF live issue – parts of it are excellent and in general the issues surrounding a broad range of topics are covered well. It is certainly useful to have a selection of compiled Scripture passages for each of the issues covered. Some readers will find that the range of options presented is a helpful approach; others, however, may be frustrated by this attempt to provide non-directional advice.

This book follows on from ‘What Could I Say?’ by the same author (Triple Helix 2003; Spring:19). While there is some overlap between the two books, ‘What Could I Do?’ shifts the emphasis to the hard choices we all face by seeking to offer biblical guidance on a variety of difficult areas. The diverse range of topics covered includes environmental issues, sexuality, money and the use of time. The initial section deals generally with decision-making and is probably the only part of the book that would be read as a whole; the remainder is more likely to be dipped into rather than be read in one sitting.

My main criticism of the author’s approach in this book is that he appears reluctant to offer any definitive guidance. The introduction states, ‘there’s only one person who has the right to tell you what to do and that’s God’. There is no mention of the authority delegated to others such as consultants, teachers, police and pastors. Therefore, in a messy and complex world, it all appears to come down to the individual Christian’s personal view on the right course to take. To illustrate this, I was somewhat startled to see the following advice given to a woman facing an unwanted pregnancy: ‘In the last analysis it is you who have the right and responsibility to choose to have an abortion or to have your baby.’

Whatever thought to the challenge not to short-change our patients/clients is vital. However, more compassion, humility and cognisance of human suffering are required than can be found in this book.

Karen Palmer is a Staff Grade Psychiatrist in Glasgow

What Could I Do? A handbook for making hard choices

Peter Hicks

WHAT COULD I DO?

Peter Hicks

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The R Option

Michael Schluter and David John Lee

The Relationships Foundation 2003

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Visio Divina (divine seeing) and Praying with Icons are ways to pray through works of art. So how does that personality affect your prayer life? You probably tend to have high expectations. You may beat yourself up if you think your prayer life is lacking. So, you may find it helpful to follow the ancient practice of fixed-hour prayer that is explained in such books as Phyllis Tickle’s The Divine Hours. Or you may want to relax your prayer habit, perhaps by taking prayer walks or injecting some form of play (such as coloring or painting) into your prayer life. I certainly agree with that view. But you may be helped by thinking about how your personality influences your prayer life, and how your prayer life can be enriched by cultivating those practices that take advantage of your personality strengths and counter your weaknesses.

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Prayers don't really work in real life it's a manifestation of humans to find hope in situations which are out of hands of their control or at least they believe that it is out of their hands. Being an atheist I can assure you your hard work and commitment will work but not your prayers. Here's a thing humans are very curious animals and want to know stuff and always looking for reasons why something happens like your questions and when we don't find any reason we simply use our lower sense and label it god must've done. Similarly when situation which is not in control