

Ordained Servant prayer

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From the Editor

From time to time it is valuable for us to step outside of our theological tradition to appreciate some of the good things we may find there, as well as to learn better critical skills in assessing our and other's theology. Review articles provide a nice format for this kind of investigation. So in this issue Alan Strange is reviewing a book on prayer from a pietistic Norwegian Lutheran, and a book of theology by an Assembly of God pastor.

Prayer should be a high priority on every church officer's agenda. But so often we think of prayer merely as a duty involving much repetition. This view of prayer, and the practice it implies, is sure to kill all inspiration to be faithful to this important duty.

Recently, Alan Strange was in our home on a Lord's Day afternoon, and we were discussing prayer. Alan mentioned a book outside of the Reformed tradition that has been very helpful to him. I thought it sounded strangely familiar, so I went into my study and there it was in a nice hardcover edition from the mid-twentieth century: Ole Hallesby's *Prayer* published by Augsburg Publishing House in 1953. This is the forty-fifth printing since 1931, and it's still in print today. My wife, Robin, and I promptly read it and came to see why Alan Strange found it so refreshing. Hallesby combines the sagacity of an experienced Christian leader with the realism of one who has himself struggled with prayer, along with an infectious, childlike delight in his Lord. So I asked Alan if he would be willing to write a review article on this book, which he does in "The Joy and Work of Prayer." Also, Cynthia Rowland, a member of our congregation who has taught a woman's study on prayer, reviews a book by an author more familiar in our circles, Susan Hunt, *Prayers of the Bible*.

Let me offer a few recommendations. D.A. Carson has written a very stimulating treatment of Paul's prayers, *A Call to Spiritual Reformation: Priorities from Paul and His Prayers* (IVP, 1992). Another book on prayer designed to steer us out of ruts is Richard L. Pratt Jr.'s *Pray with Your Eyes Open* (P&R, 1987). Finally, two nineteenth-century Presbyterians have authored excellent treatments, designed especially to help ministers: Samuel Miller, *Thoughts on Public Prayer* (1849; Sprinkle, 1985; Nabu, 2010), and B. M. Palmer, *A Theology of Prayer* (1894; Sprinkle, 1980; Hess, 1998).

And, don't miss a poem on prayer by that consummate seventeenth-century poet George Herbert.

New as of last month is the presence of three new formats for OSO: PDF, ePub, and Mobi. This allows you to download the entire contents of OSO to a wide variety of portable devices such as Nook, Kindle, iPod Touch, and iPhone.

Blessings in the Lamb,
Gregory Edward Reynolds

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Ordained Servant exists to help encourage, inform, and equip church officers for faithful, effective, and God glorifying ministry in the visible church of the Lord Jesus Christ. Its primary audience is ministers, elders, and deacons of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, as well as interested officers from other Presbyterian and Reformed churches. Through high quality editorials, articles, and book reviews we endeavor to stimulate clear thinking and the consistent practice of historic, confessional Presbyterianism.

ServantReading

The Joy and Work of Prayer Review Article

by Alan D. Strange

Prayer, by Ole Hallesby, translated by Clarence J. Carlsen. Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1994, 208 pages, \$8.99.

Prayer is both the greatest privilege and the hardest work. There is, at times, a sweetness and joy in prayer unlike anything else, and there is, at other times, an incomparable agony and misery in prayer. We are told to “pray without ceasing,” and the other commands of perpetual obligation in the latter part of 1 Thessalonians 5 tend also to be associated with prayer, commands to “rejoice always,” “give thanks in all things,” and the like. As important as the Word and sacraments are, particularly the preaching of the Word, we are not commanded to “do them” unceasingly as we are prayer. Prayer is commanded corporately, in public worship, privately, and secretly (WCF 21.6).

WLC 178 defines prayer as “an offering up of our desires unto God, in the name of Christ, by the help of his Spirit; with confession of our sins, and thankful acknowledgement of his mercies.” This is a rational, and right, definition of prayer. Yet prayer is also a mystery that surpasses the comprehension of us all. It’s hard to reduce what prayer is to mere words, because, as the hymn says, “Prayer is the soul’s sincere desire, unuttered or expressed.” Some say that the Word and sacraments are objective—God speaking to us—and prayer is subjective—us speaking back to God. And yet, it is God who moves in us so that we pray, Christ who ever lives to make intercession, and the Spirit who works in us to pray and himself prays for us with unutterable groaning. Prayer is not a solitary activity. It is made to the Father in the Son by the Spirit. It is God himself working in us, breathing through us, as it were, back to himself, lifting us up so that we have fellowship in prayer in the heavenly places with the triune God.

Many saints grow discouraged in prayer, finding it to be more difficult than they think it should be. If it’s an offering up to the Father of our desires, in the name of the Son, by the help of the Spirit, how difficult could it be? Given the great salvation that we have in him, would we not be most eager to confess our sins and acknowledge his mercies? These and other matters associated with prayer are addressed with great skill and insight in the timeless work on prayer by Ole Hallesby (1879–1961). This is no new book but a classic written by a Norwegian pietist pastor, who also worked as a seminary professor in Oslo for many years, having been imprisoned in World War II for his resistance to the Nazi regime. This is a book that has gone through dozens of editions since its first publication in 1931 and that Augsburg Fortress Press keeps in print.

A few caveats about Hallesby's book. As a conservative pietist, he has some theological positions out of sync with confessional Presbyterianism, evident at points where he treats predestination, the extent of the atonement, and like issues. He tends toward the mystical at times, giving mild credence to visions and other non-cessationist phenomena. All told, however, his theology is better than one might expect, particularly as it pertains to the plight of man and the sole sufficiency of Christ our redeemer. In fact, what he gets right in this book more than makes up for his theological deficiencies. This is one of the best books that I have ever read on prayer, and likely to be of significant comfort and help to saints struggling with the holy calling of prayer.

In his first chapter, a long one entitled "What Prayer Is," we can immediately and thankfully sense the difference between this work and so many others on prayer, particularly of the last half-century. Most books on prayer of recent years have had the "how to become a prayer warrior" flavor about them, leaving honest souls weighed down, feeling that sinners the likes of us have little hope of ever growing in our prayer lives. Hallesby is quite different, immediately acknowledging the depth of our plight and treating the whole subject of prayer with refreshing honesty. Hallesby deals at some length with our helplessness and faith, arguing that prayer consists largely of two things: the recognition on our part of our utter helplessness, and the belief that Christ is the only one who can do something about it. We must recognize, because we are creatures, and sinful ones at that, that we are helpless. That alone, however, would lead to despair. The realization of our helplessness must be coupled with faith, belief in the Lord Jesus Christ as the only one who can do us poor sinners any good. In one sense, Hallesby says time and again, prayer is simply letting in Christ who is knocking at the door of our heart. God both initiates prayer and is its answer.

Hallesby deals with "Difficulties in Prayer" in chapter 2. Many believers wonder how prayer has gone from being the delight that it was earlier in their Christian lives to the burden that it often becomes. In part, Hallesby writes, this is due to several difficulties: we think that we must help God to fulfill our prayers; we think that prayer involves commanding God to do our bidding; and we fail to pray in Jesus's name. Failing to pray in Jesus's name means failing to rest profoundly in him, failing to see our prayer chamber as a resting place "in which we lie at the feet of Jesus and point to all those things which we lack and which make our hearts tired and weary" (61). We need to recover that sense of rest in Christ so that we would look forward to entering into prayer.

Prayer is resting in Christ, but prayer is also work to which we are to be committed throughout the whole of our Christian life. Chapter 3 is about this holy work and calling: It was the calling of the apostles to conquer the world by and through the work of prayer. Hallesby suggests that we should pray for all that we encounter, and if that seems an undue burden, he suggests that since we criticize others easily and quickly, why not pray for them instead? We need to come to see that prayer is the most blessed work in which we can engage. It is, in fact, "the most important work in the kingdom" (70). I recall visiting a dear saint years ago when I was an intern. I sought to encourage her that, though home-bound, she could still play an important role in the life of the church by study and prayer. My suggestion yielded something I did not expect: she reluctantly revealed that she read the Bible through seven times a year and prayed at least two hours daily, including through the local church directory (of over two hundred members) daily and the entire OP directory weekly. What a mighty work in which she was engaged! I left duly humbled, realizing what a spiritual pygmy I was compared to this giant.

I also recall encouraging my father-in-law when he was downcast because he was no longer able to be active in all the life of the church as he had been. As I told him, he may have been the most important member of the church, because of the amount of time that he spent in prayer for the church, his family, friends, and neighbors. Hallesby rightly argues that prayer is a prerequisite to all the other work of the church, to preaching, pastoring, etc. Because prayer gives expression to our utter dependence, the Lord is often pleased to use that to make effectual the other means of grace. The means of grace are efficacious only as the Spirit of God empowers them, and prayer is that needy posture whereby we seek the Spirit's blessing on the appointed means. Without prayer, all of our preaching and sacramental administration remains fruitless. Prayer is that waiting upon God in which we acknowledge that he and he alone can bless and we look to him for that blessing in all the means that he has appointed.

Chapters 4 and 5 are on "wrestling in prayer." Many Christians express perplexity as to why prayer entails so much difficulty and suffering. Hallesby answers:

If prayer is, as we have seen, the central function of the new life of faith, the very heart-beat of our life in God, it is obvious that our prayer life must become the target against which Satan directs his best and most numerous darts." (89)

The enemy appeals to our carnal nature, seeking to enlist the cooperation of our flesh in the battle against our prayer life. All of our difficulties in prayer arise because "we are not in harmony with the Spirit of Prayer" (100). Because of our persistent fleshliness and neediness, all prayer ultimately becomes prayer for "the Spirit of Prayer" (101). The last chapter of the book, chapter 11, treats the need of the Holy Spirit as the Spirit of Prayer (169–176).

It is often, wrongly, thought that wrestling in prayer means wrestling with God until he yields up what it is that we seek. But, Hallesby declares, such a notion is pagan. In fact, Hallesby insists several times in this book, those who say "we should pray . . . in order to get God to give us something" (153) reveal that their view of prayer is not Christian but pagan. Though passages like Genesis 32:22–32 and Matthew 15:1–8, not to mention Luke 18:1–8, might suggest to some that wrestling in prayer does mean "seeking to get something" from God, "our striving [in prayer] is a struggle, not with God, but with ourselves" (110). It's a struggle with our selfishness and our sense of ease. Hallesby has a wonderful treatment of this (as he does of many of the biblical passages treating prayer), ending with a helpful treatment on prayer and fasting, the last being a lost discipline among the broader Christian public.

In chapter 6, Hallesby addresses misuses of prayer, such as that of James and John in their request to sit on Jesus's right hand in the coming Kingdom. Hallesby notes how tenderly the Lord treats James and John, though the disciples are angry with them. The Lord is quite kind to us, giving us what we need and withholding what we don't need, answering our prayers always for our good and his glory, even when we misuse prayer (James 4:3). In chapter 7, Hallesby addresses the meaning of prayer: "Prayer is given and ordained for the purpose of glorifying God" (129). Doubtless we receive many benefits; in fact, we receive just what we need in prayer. And the wonderful truth is, that which we most need as God's children, and that which most glorifies him, are one and the same. Prayer is coming to him in acknowledged helplessness, giving everything over to the Lord, resting and trusting in him to do what is most needed, and waiting upon him. This

is what Paul did. He prayed three times to be relieved of his thorn in the flesh. The Lord told him that he would continue to suffer, because, in Paul's weakness, the Lord's strength was made perfect (2 Cor. 12:9–10). Even Jesus prayed three times for the cup to depart. But he also prayed, "nevertheless not my will, but thine, be done" (KJV Luke 22:42). The ultimate goal of prayer is not that our way would prevail but that our hearts would be brought into perfect conformity with his and that our ultimate prayer would be "Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done in earth as it is in heaven" (KJV Matt. 6:10).

In his chapter 8 on "forms of prayer," Hallesby's pietism shines through, especially in his conviction that prayer should be "free and spontaneous" (137). He is no fan of prayer books, though I would advise a judicious use of things like *Valley of Vision*, the *Trinity Hymnal*, the *Book of Common Prayer* (1928 or before) to help us, particularly one struggling in forming prayers. He then lists five kinds of prayers (supplicatory, thanksgiving, praise, conversation, and wordless). There is no explicit mention of confession of sin here, though presumably it's part of supplication (for forgiveness); it's still odd given the book's constant emphasis on how weak, needy, sinful, and helpless we are that there is no explicit section here on confession of sin. Nonetheless, he gets at the heart of prayer several times in this chapter, writing, "to pray is to let Jesus into our lives" and "prayer is the breath of the soul" (145). While he is hardly a confessional Calvinist, we ought not too quickly to dismiss his statements about "letting Jesus in." The first chapter sets this plate well and convincingly: Jesus initiates the relationship, but we must ever open up ourselves to him, and this is no small part of prayer.

He also deals in chapters 9 and 10 with "problems of prayer" and the "school of prayer," in which we work through objections and are taught the necessary self-denial for prayer. In terms of the later, all self-denial comes from the Spirit enabling us to die to the flesh so that we might live to prayer. As far as the problems of prayer are concerned, Hallesby lists five, including: How can prayer, being weak, accomplish great things? Why should we pray? Does God need intercessory prayer? Is prayer consistent with God's government of the world? And does God answer the prayers of the unconverted? These and other answers can be found in Hallesby's warm, encouraging and helpful book. A series of study questions for each chapter, under the rubric of Review, Examine, Apply, Compare, and Think have been added in more recent editions of the book.

It's impossible to replicate in a review the encouragement and, frankly, delight that this book affords. One is often asked to write in an area of expertise. Who can say that they are such on prayer? I am certainly not, but I have read a few books and preached a bit on the subject. There are excellent things by John Owens, Matthew Henry, and many other older writers on prayer. There are some good things by newer writers, particularly on the Lord's Prayer. But for the struggling and the discouraged, for those keenly sensing their helplessness, I have not read anything in memory more fitting than Hallesby's work on prayer. If that "sweet hour of prayer" seems to be alluding you, perhaps it would be worthwhile to peruse (prayerfully, of course) Hallesby's modern classic.

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ServantReading

Spiritual Theology Review Article

by Alan D. Strange

Spiritual Theology: A Systematic Study of the Christian Life, by Simon Chan.
Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 1998, 300 pages, \$23.00.

Let me offer two reasons for reviewing a book published in 1998. First of all, the distinguished editor of this journal asked me to. Secondly, though the book is more than a decade old and a number of books like it have been written since then, the basic theme of this book is a popular one of the last quarter century: doctrine and practice, theology and spirituality, have frequently been divorced and need instead to be integrated. I agree that we do not want to separate theology and praxis—who would want to? I also agree that we tend to, not just in the post-Enlightenment era, but since Eden. It's altogether too common for us to settle for what Jonathan Edwards called “purely theoretical speculative knowledge,” in place of affective, hearty Christianity (this volume has, by the way, a rather interesting treatment of Edwards' *Religious Affections*, 214–220). There is, however, as one might suspect, more to this story than just that. Though Chan's theme is rather ordinary, he pulls off his treatment of spiritual theology with deftness and skill, though not without some cavils from those of us who are Reformed. There is, in other words, that which Chan offers herein that's insightful and helpful, and there's that which he offers which is dubious, especially with respect to his non-cessationism and mysticism.

The work is titled *Spiritual Theology* and serves as a kind of synonym for another word frequently used therein: “spirituality.” I learned at Westminster Theological Seminary from Professor Gaffin, Philip Hughes, and others that, properly, “spiritual” (as in the spiritual man of 1 Corinthians 2), and its cognates, indicated not the quality of the subject but the reality of the presence and work of the Holy Spirit. Spirituality, taken thusly, means that which comes not by the agency of man but by the agency of the Spirit of God. Interestingly, the word “spirituality” is often nowadays pitted against “religion” so that one commonly reads that this or that celebrity, while not being a practitioner of, as is often put, “organized religion,” is, nonetheless, “a very spiritual person.” Presumably, the inward is identified with spirituality and the outward with religion. Adhering to religion then is taken as merely outward and thus inherently hypocritical. Spirituality is perfectly acceptable in this schema because it's an inward virtue that does not have or require outward observances. It is true that one may have the merely outward, as did the Pharisees. The falsehood present here, however, is that true inward spirituality never manifests itself in outward religious organization and observances. One may be religious without being spiritual; one cannot be spiritual, however, without being religious.

The church, to come at it from another angle, is both an organization and an organism, having both outward religious forms and inward spirituality (the latter pertaining to those who have saving faith). This assertion ties in with the nineteenth-century Old School Presbyterian notion of the “Spirituality of the Church.” Yes, the doctrine of the spirituality of the church has to do with the proper province of the church over against other divinely ordained institutions like the state and the family. The task of the church is a spiritual one (the gathering and perfecting of the saints) and she uses spiritual means (the Word, sacraments, and prayer) to carry it out, bearing the power of the keys, not of the sword (as does the state) or the rod (as does the family). The power is said to be spiritual because her task is carried out in and by the power of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is the one who empowers the means of grace so that the church might be gathered and perfected. So there is a tie between the way that we use spirituality as Presbyterians when we speak of the spirituality of the church and the way that the broader theological world uses spirituality to indicate the spiritual life that the Christian faith produces.

Chan begins his work with a first chapter setting forth the nature and criteria of Christian spiritual theology. He starts by noting that in the past, the term “spirituality” applied simply to religious life. Now “a sociocultural movement, an interest group or a particular cause or concern” can be denominated as a “spirituality,” so that we speak today, for example of “small-group spirituality, marriage spirituality, and single-life spirituality” (15). Thus spirituality is “understood in terms of personal (but not individualistic or private, since the Christian life is always defined by a person’s concrete existence within a community) relationship with God,” but not simply subjectively. Chan intends to treat spirituality as it is biblically, not just “a phenomenological description of spirituality” but faithfulness to the “given” that describes the Christian community: “the Christian story revolving around the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth.” That story is the one “that gives shape to our lives and defines the nature of our existence as a Christian community” (16).

Chan proceeds to talk about the nature of spiritual theology (“spirituality is the lived reality, whereas spiritual theology is the systemic reflection and formalization of that reality”), spiritual theology as a theological discipline, its relation to other theological disciplines, and a survey of types of spirituality. Chan sets forth formal criteria for an adequate spiritual theology: comprehensiveness, coherence, and evocability. The rest of this orienting introductory chapter was devoted to material criteria for a Christian spiritual theology: the global-contextual criterion, the evangelical criterion, and the charismatic criterion. This sets the plate for the rest of the book, together with what Chan calls ascetical theology, basically the living of a disciplined Christian life.

The book is divided into two main parts: the theological and the practical (“the theological principles of spiritual theology; the practice of the spiritual life”). The theological enjoys, after the first foundational chapter described above, treatment in chapters 2–5. Chapter 2 treats the doctrine of God as the foundation of Christian spirituality. Chan rightly understands that the doctrine of God is foundational to the rest of the theological loci and thus to any development of a spiritual theology. The God that we worship is both transcendent and immanent, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Over against Moltmann, Chan argues transcendence, insisting that though the West may be taken up with God’s immanence, the East wants also to emphasize his transcendence, particularly an East that has been so in the thrall of earthly potentates through the centuries. And over against social trinitarianism, which Chan believes threatens to turn into tri-theism, Chan argues an emphasis on the oneness of God, favoring Augustine’s psychological model of

the Trinity. He criticizes all the demythologizing that reduces Christian experience to sociology. Clearly, in all this, he resists the West's rationalistic reduction of the faith while remaining sensitive to the need not to give way to mysticism, although in general his spirituality comes out too mystical and charismatic for those wanting to develop a Reformed spiritual theology.

In chapter 3, he treats sin and human nature. He does recognize sin to be more radical than does Roman Catholicism, even using the phrase "total depravity" several times to describe our fallen condition. He identifies himself with Augustine in this. But he also differs from Augustine in arguing that sin is relational as much as, if not more than, forensic. He says that sin is "less a legal problem than a family problem (as expressed in the parable of the prodigal son)" (61). What he seems to forget is that the prodigal son was a son and that we are such, after the fall, only by adoption, which is a legal declaration that provides the basis for restored relationship. Chan is to be commended throughout this book for seeking to be balanced, trying to find the best in each tradition (Roman, Eastern, and Protestant), though also failing to be as critical as he should at points. His criticism of the overly legal nature of Protestantism is not as careful and balanced as it should be, however. He does take sin quite seriously, though, and calls for a disciplined approach to the Christian life that fights the devil, the flesh, and the world and seeks to recognize the alien character of the church in a hostile world. One of his strengths in chapter 5 on the church as the community of saints is to argue, on the one hand, against a ghettoized church, and, on the other hand, an overly relativized church that loses its pilgrim character and its witness to a sinful world. One thinks of Lloyd-Jones's dictum that the church does the world the least good when she seeks to be most like the world. This is clearly the sentiment of Simon Chan.

Chapter 4 deals with salvation and the life of spiritual progress, in short, the doctrine of Christ and of the Holy Spirit. Chan notes that Gnosticism, neo-Platonism, and Buddhism see salvation as deliverance from a transitory history to a timeless eternity. Christianity, in contrast,

takes history with the utmost seriousness because the experience of personhood [and "personality rather than its extinction lies at the root of the Christian conception of the ultimately real"] involves real continuity between the historical present and reality beyond the present, which is traditionally called eternity." (78)

This sort of observation is one of the work's strengths, especially its observations about Hinduism, Buddhism, and Confucianism, met by the broad orthodox Christian tradition. Chan proceeds at some length to unpack grace and its effects, discussing justification, sanctification, and glorification, offering some helpful insights of Calvin and the Puritans, as well as views of other traditions, ending with a discussion of perfection, which he affirms, though more modestly asserted than is often the case (if such can be said). We already noted chapter 5 on the church, but Chan is to be commended in seeing all of this theology as developed and lived out in the life of the church and the communion (or community) of the saints.

The second part of the book takes what Chan has developed in the first part, in examining the traditional theological loci, and seeks to apply it to life, examining how this faith that we profess is lived out among us. This involves a variety of disciplines whereby we embody and practice the faith once-for-all delivered to the saints. We confessional Presbyterians may understand what the doctrine of the spirituality of the church means in

one sense, as we've seen above; however, in the sense of a lived-out faith, the true spirituality of our faith, we may fall short. The temptation of some traditions, the charismatic, for instance, is to privilege Christian experience over Christian doctrine, to settle for shallow doctrine that's an inch deep and a mile wide. And such shallow theology undermines rich experience, yielding instead immaturity and Christian adolescence. The Reformed, on the other hand, have such rich theology and yet sometimes settle for beautiful doctrine not lived out.

To be sure, a lack of vibrant spirituality is not what marks our tradition at its best, and even in many of its historic expressions. But, if there's one thing that has marked Old School Presbyterians in more recent years, it is great doctrine—accompanied by lives that are sometimes spiritually barren. So we need spiritual discipline. We need among us a hearty spirituality. Chan starts with prayer in chapter 6. This is clearly the fountainhead of our spirituality. This heads part two of the book “because prayer is the first act that links doctrine to practice, and all the other exercises are simply elaborations of this primal act” (125). He discusses prayer as act and habit, the divine initiative in prayer, growth in prayer, praying by the rule, and other matters.

Now we could wish for a fuller exposition in this second section of the book of what marks a healthy Reformed and Presbyterian spirituality: a vigorous use of the means of grace (Word, sacraments, and prayer) as is fitting in the public, private, and secret spheres. We have the Family Directory of Worship from Westminster as well as the Directory for the Public Worship of God. We are to be seeking the Lord personally in prayer regularly, as well as praying in our families, catechizing, and using all of our time, treasures, and talents, to the glory of our great God and king. There's too much mysticism, monasticism, and charismatism in Chan's view of spirituality. Again, however, a judicious use of this book by someone from our tradition, particularly by a well-trained pastor or other church member, may prove beneficial.

Spiritual breadth of this sort, as long as we are discerning, can be quite helpful. In chapter 10, for instance, Chan discusses a rule of life, with a view to encouraging the broad laity to benefit from the best of monasticism. He does not call for the church to live under the Rule of St. Benedict, but rather calls for us all to have scheduled times of devotional prayer, and to avail ourselves of a wide variety of spiritual disciplines. These are helpful but are, arguably, best packaged within our tradition. The problem is—do we attend to these things? Some Orthodox Presbyterians these days seem to think that Sabbath observance is the only thing needful. Sabbath observance—neglected as a subject by Chan—admittedly is necessary for a vibrant spirituality, but it is not sufficient. We need in addition to the Lord's Day all the spiritual disciplines during the week that will keep us mindful of communion with God and each other: all those things, in other words, that make for vital spirituality and are not a burden, rightly understood and employed, but an incomparable blessing.

After discussing prayer fairly extensively, Chan proceeds, in chapters 7–9, to treat various spiritual exercises focusing on God and self, the Word, and the world. With respect to the first, Chan deals with the practice of the presence of God, conformity to the will of God, fidelity to grace, and self-examining prayer. With respect to his treatment of the Word, rather than a focus on preaching as a divine act (he thinks Protestants have too much focus on this to begin with), he urges a spiritual reading of the Word and meditation on the Word. While there are useful insights here, this is altogether too mystical for me in its attempts to bypass reason and appeal directly to emotion. And in the chapter on the world, he deals not only with questions of political engagement, but has a rather

interesting treatment of spiritual friendship. Spiritual friendship is not quite the same as spiritual direction, the subject of chapter 12. Chan thinks that the Anglican and Roman Catholic practice of spiritual directors ought to be employed by all of us in some measure, and he is convinced that, without such directors, real spiritual growth will likely be stunted.

One may wonder why all the fuss over spirituality anyway since, as some assert, our standards don't address it (I've heard some say something like this before). I believe that our standards do address the spirituality of the church, both in terms of the proper province of the church and in terms of the church being a spiritual agency, the body brought into being by the work of the Holy Spirit. Our standards do teach that our faith has an accompanying spirituality, or as Calvin put it: love is the fruit of faith, obedience follows trust. Before addressing some ways in which our standards address the kinds of matters that pertain to spirituality, it might be helpful to note, contrary to much popular perception, that spirituality, and particularly the development of the doctrine of the work of the Holy Spirit, is central to the Reformed project. One might read a work like Chan's, with all of its mystical, perfectionist, and non-cessationist sensibilities and feel that we Reformed are rather lacking when it comes to the Holy Spirit and spirituality: This is not at all true. This is why it might prove helpful to note here that the doctrine of the Holy Spirit as we know it is a distinctly Protestant (and Reformed) development.

Before Calvin, who Warfield rightly denominated the "Theologian of the Holy Spirit," the doctrine of the work of the Holy Spirit was underdeveloped in the Church, particularly in the Western Church, and tending to be mystical in the Eastern Church. One can witness its absence from the ancient and medieval church, where there was a great deal of development of the doctrine of God and the person of Christ. The work of Christ was developed in Anselm's theology and languished in the East where the doctrine of the Holy Spirit tended to be decoupled from Christ and his Word. One does not find a full treatment of the Spirit in Thomas's *Summa Theologica* or any other such work until Calvin's *Institutes of the Christian Religion*. Previously, as with Aquinas, theologians would proceed from Christology to Ecclesiology (bypassing, largely, Pneumatology or Soteriology), which means of course that the means of grace must work on their own steam, as it were. It's unsurprising that the misguided doctrine of the efficacy of the sacraments (as *ex opere operato*) developed. Calvin changed all of this in his momentous Book III of the *Institutes* (treating the work of the Holy Spirit), preceding Book IV on the Church. Calvin argued that all the blessings and benefits of Christ do us no good, in fact, as long as we remain outside of him. It is the Holy Spirit who brings Christ to us and us to Christ. This is the heart of any real doctrine of spirituality.

How is this insight of Calvin expressed in our standards? This reality is vividly realized in the Westminster Confession of Faith, chapters 25 and 26. The former chapter, 25, is on the doctrine of the church, while the latter chapter, 26, is on the communion of the saints. The relationship of those two chapters has very much to do with true spirituality. Chapter 25 sets forth what the Bible teaches about the invisible and visible catholic church. It then proceeds to address matters pertaining to the visible church: it possesses the means of grace, out of it there is no ordinary possibility of salvation, it differs in time and place in purity and visibility, there will always be some visible witness, and Christ alone, and not the pope, is its head. Chapter 26 picks up on the invisible again, at least in the first section, teaching that

all saints, that are united to Jesus Christ their head, by his Spirit, and by faith, have fellowship with him in his graces . . . and glory: and being united to one another in love, they have communion in each other's gifts and graces.

To whom does this refer? The elect, who, as “members of the invisible church . . . enjoy union and communion with him in grace and glory” (WLC 65). Chapter 26 starts by highlighting that those in whom the Spirit has truly worked, the elect, enjoy union with Christ and communion with their fellow believers. This is true spirituality. The questions in the Larger Catechism from here to WLC 90 make it clear that it is only those in whom the Spirit works who enjoy all the blessings and benefits of Christ, as opposed to those who are in the visible church only.

As important as the visible church is—all those in whom the Spirit has worked are to be, and usually are, in it—not all its members partake of true Christian spirituality, because not all of its members enjoy the efficacious grace given by the Holy Spirit in the exercise of the means of grace. This is why we have not only a chapter on the church, but a chapter on the communion of the saints following it. We can think of these two as addressing church as institute and organism, religion and spirituality, the outward and the inward. We must not pit these against each other but insist on both. In recent years, not only have partisans of Federal Vision, but others tending toward formalism (resting in the outward forms), sought to downplay these realities. The answer to our perceived spiritual ailments is not an over-objectification of the visible church and the means of grace but a vibrant visible church leading to a vital spirituality. An overstress on the outward is a departure from the witness of our standards particularly and that of the Reformed faith more broadly. My bringing this up is not meant to create doubt, whereby timorous souls wonder, “Am I elect or not?” Rather it is meant to encourage us to remember that the means of grace are not ends in themselves but means to an end—and Christ is that end. All the means are to lead us to rest and trust in Christ alone. That is the beginning and the end of true spirituality—life in Christ by the work of the Holy Spirit.

Chan has produced a work on Christian spirituality fitting for evangelical theology. It is important for us as Presbyterians to attend to this sense of spirituality as well as the spirituality of the church in the Old School Presbyterian sense. This is part of what we do when we address the question of union, the union of saints with Christ. It is only those in whom the Spirit has worked, who are part of the invisible church as well as the visible church (ordinarily). It is only those in the communion of saints that enjoy such union and all the blessings and benefits of it, as elaborated in the Westminster Larger Catechism from questions 65–90. It is these who enjoy union and communion with the triune God and their fellow saints, both now and forevermore. Much work is being done with respect to union. Books have been published, and the blogs are ablaze with discussions about union with Christ. Some disagreements have surfaced among those committed to the Westminster standards over whether union must be preceded by justification. These debates, however, should not deter us. We need to continue to work on matters related to our union with Christ and come to as much agreement as we can. We need to make sure that we have a vibrant Reformed spirituality that accompanies and follows our cogent Reformed theology.

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ServantReading

Cynthia Rowland

Prayers of the Bible: Equipping Women to Call on God in Truth, by Susan Hunt. Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2011, viii + 155 pages, \$12.99, paper.

Prayers of the Bible: Equipping Women to Call on God in Truth, Leader's Guide, by Susan Hunt. Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2011, vi + 172 pages, \$14.99, paper.

In her latest book, *Prayers of the Bible: Equipping Women to Call on God in Truth*, Susan Hunt follows a similar vein as her previous books with her emphasis on equipping women with sound, Reformed theology. Mrs. Hunt is a Women's Ministry Consultant for the Presbyterian Church in America's Christian Education and Publications Committee. She has authored several books, all with a focus of encouraging women to embrace true theology and apply it to their lives. A favorite, *The True Woman*,¹ challenges women to set aside the lure of today's feminist agenda, which creates "the new woman," as Hunt terms it, and embrace the Bible's plan for a woman's life which creates "a true woman." In this latest work, *Prayers of the Bible*, Hunt explores biblical theology and the truth of Scripture by examining select prayers in the Bible.

Hunt states the purpose of this book in the introduction: to answer the question, "How do we learn to pray?" Her theme verse for the book is Psalm 145:18: "The LORD is near to all who call on him, to all who call on him in truth." If I were to summarize its purpose in one phrase, it would be that it is to teach women how to pray *in truth*.

Hunt writes twelve chapters, each of which explores a prayer in Scripture and hones in on a theological truth. She begins chapter 1 by examining Paul's prayer of doxology in Ephesians 1:1–14. From this prayer, she draws out the concept of the trinity and the function of each person of the trinity. Relating the roles of the trinity to the male/female distinction of human beings and tying it into Genesis 1–3, she teaches the truth of gender distinctiveness and woman's role as helper. Finally, she introduces the idea of the covenant of grace and the concept of redemption. Each chapter applies the truth learned to a practical question: "How do we call on God in truth?" The answer to that question in this chapter is "with gratitude for our redemption" (24). Chapter 2 examines Jesus's high priestly prayer from John 17 and ties it to the theme of glorifying God. In answer to the question, "How do we call on God in truth?" Hunt replies: "1) Pray for His glory and 2) Pray according to His eternal plan and purpose" (35).

The structure of each chapter works nicely as a devotional. Each chapter follows the same format: a prayer is studied, a theological truth relating to this prayer is introduced, the question "How do we call on God in truth?" is answered, a real-life anecdote is

¹ Susan Hunt, *The True Woman*, (Wheaton: Crossway, 1997).

conveyed, and application/assignment questions (in a section called “reflect and pray”) are given at the end. The “reflect and pray” section contains excellent, stimulating questions and encourages probing introspection designed to help mature the reader and solidify the chapter’s subject matter. I found that each chapter fits nicely with a week’s devotional time, allowing a reader to study one prayer and corresponding theological truth per week.

Along with the book, Hunt has designed a leader’s guide which would fully equip a women’s Bible study leader. The guide has a complete agenda for each study along with hand-outs and ideas for developing or strengthening relationships within the group. Susan’s ideas and agendas are a result of her many years of experience leading women’s groups. Having led several studies myself, I can see how this material would be extremely useful and time-saving.

Readers might also be interested in another book on the topic of prayer that takes a fairly different angle: Paul Miller’s book *A Praying Life: Connecting with God in a Distracting World*.² This book provides a unique perspective on prayer as a relationship, where prayer is likened to a “feast.” Miller effectively tackles head-on the difficult issues of praying when it doesn’t seem like your prayers ever get answered (he calls it “the desert”) and of Jesus’s seemingly over-the-top promise that if we ask for anything in his name, he will do it (John 14:14). He addresses how our cynical cultural attitudes are bleeding over to our Christian worldviews and ultimately to our cynicism in prayer. Most importantly, he emphasizes our utter helplessness without prayer. This book also comes with a DVD seminar conducted by Paul Miller and a study guide for use in a group setting. I highly recommend this series as a companion study as it focuses on additional prayer issues.

In a world in which the church is surprisingly ignorant of or progressively shedding the fundamental principles of the Christian faith, I am encouraged to read sound books like the ones that Susan Hunt is writing. Truly, sound theology is the foundation of Christian maturity and effective prayer. This book certainly challenges women to study the Scriptures daily and apply its truth to their lives and prayers.

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² Paul Miller, *A Praying Life: Connecting with God in a Distracting World* (Colorado Springs, CO: Navpress, 2009).

Servant Poetry

George Herbert (1593-1633)

Prayer (I)

Prayer the church's banquet, angel's age,
 God's breath in man returning to his birth,
 The soul in paraphrase, heart in pilgrimage,
The Christian plummet sounding heav'n and earth

Engine against th' Almighty, sinner's tow'r,
 Reversed thunder, Christ-side-piercing spear,
 The six-days world transposing in an hour,
A kind of tune, which all things hear and fear;

Softness, and peace, and joy, and love, and bliss,
 Exalted manna, gladness of the best,
 Heaven in ordinary, man well drest,
The milky way, the bird of Paradise,

 Church-bells beyond the stars heard, the soul's blood,
 The land of spices; something understood.