

Jonathan Aitken.
Prayers for People under Pressure.
ISBN 0 8264 7639 2 or 9780 8264 7639 5
Continuum, 2005, £8.99

Jonathan Aitken, ex war correspondent, television presenter, chairman of a merchant bank, and Cabinet Minister, began his prison sentence on 9 June 1999, in HMP Belmarsh, after pleading guilty to charges of perjury at the Old Bailey. But he was well prepared.

For the previous two years, thanks initially to a weekly prayer support group of MPs, he had learnt to pray amidst defeat, disgrace, divorce, bankruptcy and the threat of jail. The journey had involved Father Gerard Hughes, an Alpha course, an Ignatian retreat and much else. This book is the fruit of his experience, and also bears the marks of his two years study at Wycliffe Hall later on.

For those who have their own prayer time in private each day, whether in prison or at home over a cup of coffee, here is material and advice from someone who has been there, done it, got the T-shirt and is still doing it.

These prayers are from a very wide range of traditions, from the Church Fathers to modern evangelicals, and dipping into the Bible, the Catholic Missal, the Book of Common Prayer, hymns, the lives of saints, and many other sources. Each prayer comes with a page of reflection, about how and why he found the prayer helpful, its history, and its relevance to the Christian life. There is lots to learn and ponder in these reflections which express a broad and catholic knowledge of Christian tradition. Well worth reading, with something to chew on.

I particularly liked his short autobiographical introduction, 'journey into prayer', describing his downfall, his repentance, and his experience of prison. Saint Francis also found the experience of prison rewarding. His prayer, 'My God, my all' is included.

Amos SSF