

Ruth Burrows
Essence of Prayer
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Here is a major contribution from the pen of a well-known writer on spiritual themes. The book falls naturally into two parts. The first half, eight chapters, contains her teaching on the essence, attitudes and practice of prayer. Beginning with 'reflections' on prayer, Burrows points up the essential need, which is to want God. She tells us that most problems arise from wanting self-satisfaction! It is a case of God or the ego, reminiscent of 'The Cloud of Unknowing', where the author warns that we must want God for Godself and not for God's gifts.

After a 'heady' beginning, the book moves on to "Prayer in the Trinity", reminding us of the presence of the Holy Spirit to assist and pray within us. Scripture such as S. John's account of the Passion and S. Paul's epistle to the Romans, Burrows tells us, has been largely inspirational for her own prayer. There is a gradual dialogue with the Word in prayer and scripture, through the Spirit of God. Our prayer is so poor but it is lifted to be one with the communion of love in the Trinity. So long as our constant intention is for God, the loving God who seeks us will continue to work in us though we do not know it. We cannot measure our own progress.

The rest of the book is a 'Carmelite exposé', comprising cameos of the four most famous saints among their members, and describing their doctrine and prayer, unique to each one as is our own. Following these Burrows gives us four short chapters on aspects of the Carmelite way of life, referring particularly to the writings of St. Teresa and St. John of the Cross, and one called 'A Stark Encounter', offering her own experience of that life. She ends the book with a section entitled 'The Consecrated Life', addressed to vowed religious but equally applicable to committed and prayerful Christians anywhere.

The first half of this book held most appeal for me containing, as it does, so much teaching on prayer; while the chapters on the saints of Carmel were useful brief glimpses into their characters and struggles in the way of prayer for each. The last few sections might well have been addressed to religious and those with particular interest in the contemplative life, but nevertheless still have something to say to the 'lay' Christian.

An impressive offering indeed, different from her earlier works, and well worth a little study.

Elizabeth CSF