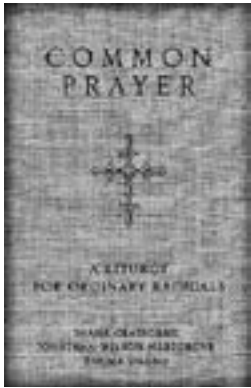


Common Prayer: A Liturgy for Ordinary Radicals

Shane Claiborne, Jonathan Wilson-Hartgrove & Enuma Okoro
Hardback: Zondervan, Nov. 2010

Review by Chris Smith



For several years now, I have been intrigued by the work of Shane Claiborne and Jonathan Wilson-Hartgrove and the sort of new monasticism to which they are committed. They have individually written many insightful books related to embodying a radical Christian faith together in community, and their first collaborative book, *Becoming the Answer to Our Prayers*, was a helpful

guide to thinking about and practicing prayer in a way that helps us become more engaged in God's redemptive work in the world. It is not surprising then, that they have now, just in time for Advent, released a prayerbook, *Common Prayer: A Liturgy for Ordinary Radicals* (co-written with Enuma Okoro, who has also authored another new book, a memoir entitled *Reluctant Pilgrim*), as a sort of follow-up to their previous work on prayer.

My initial thought upon hearing of this new project, was to question whether the people of God today really need another prayerbook? Certainly, churches with rich liturgical heritages (Catholic, Orthodox, Episcopal, Lutheran) have their own cycles of prayer, and there are several excellent inter-denominational ones – including, for instance, Phyllis Tickle's *The Divine Hours* and the Northumbria Community's *Celtic Daily Prayer* – which are widely used by individuals and churches whose liturgical roots do not run quite so deep. *Common Prayer*, this new liturgy – which should not be confused with the Episcopal Church's *Book of Common Prayer* – will serve well as a prayerbook

for those who are wanting to enter into the church's rhythms of prayer, but who do not know where to start, particularly for those in new monastic communities. It also will serve well as a supplemental guide for those who are already immersed in some form of liturgical prayer, particularly for those interested in radical discipleship.

The liturgy that Claiborne, Wilson-Hartgrove and Okoro have fashioned here, with the help of many friends across a broad swath of Christian traditions, consists of a weekly cycle of evening prayers, a single prayer for mid-day, as well as prayers for special occasions and a brief selection of appropriate songs that fit well with these prayers. The bulk of the book, however, is its annual cycle of morning prayers. The format of these morning prayers are fairly similar to those of other traditions – an opening prayer that stills us and turns our attention to God, a psalm, brief readings from the Old and New Testaments, the story of a faithful witness from Church History, the "Our Father," and a concluding blessing. Perhaps the most unique facet of this work, however, is the historical snippet that is included among each morning's prayers. Certainly, other liturgies have traditions of occasionally recognizing the feasts of certain saints, but few are so diligent in their daily remembering of saints or so broad in their scope of who they honor. What the authors have assembled here in these daily morsels of history is likely the book's greatest contribution, a sort of calendar of feasts for the saints of radical discipleship – from Mary Magdelene and early church Fathers like Origen to Quaker abolitionists to recent saints like Martin Luther King, Jr., John Howard Yoder and Jacques Ellul, and even a few, like Jean Vanier, who are still alive.

The jury, of course, is still out on the question of whether we need another prayerbook, but the richest gift of *Common Prayer*, is ironically perhaps not its prayers but its stories; in our age when history is widely scorned – and particularly so in our churches – the authors of this delightful new book call us to immerse ourselves daily in the stories of the faithful ones who have gone before us. If we are attentive to these stories and submit ourselves to the reconciling work that God wants to do in our particular places, we might perhaps find the grace to follow in their footsteps!