

Epilogue 2

Prayer

**From *Being Christian* by Rowan Williams
SPCK 2014**

Prayer is the last chapter in Rowan Williams's book; the first three are respectively Baptism, Bible and Eucharist.

Sister Wendy Beckett wrote about this book:

Unless we understand our faith we cannot live it, but it is the living that matters. Knowing and thinking and understanding are all means to draw us into life of Christ, an active living and loving way of being. Christianity is both simple and profound. Rowan Williams understands these two levels and how we come to the depth of what Jesus is by the simplicities of informed Christian practice. This is a handbook for Christian living.

This is how Williams opens the chapter:

The fourth and last of our 'Christian essentials' is prayer, and in particular, the need for us all to grow in prayer. Growing in prayer is not simply acquiring a set of special spiritual skills that operate in one bit of your life. It is about growing into what St Paul calls 'the measure of the full stature of Christ (Ephesians 4:13). It is growing into the kind of humility that Christ shows us. Growing in prayer, in other words, is growing in Christian humanity.

It seems that all Christian reflection, all theology worthy of the name, began as people realized that because of Jesus Christ they could talk to God in a different way. It was the new experience of Christian prayer that got people thinking, 'If Jesus somewhere makes it possible for us to talk to God in a new way, then surely there are things we ought to be saying and believing about Jesus'. And the great exploratory business of theology began to unfold...

Some kind of instruction in prayer used to say, at the beginning, 'Put yourself in the presence of God'. But I often wonder whether it would be more helpful to say, 'Put yourself in the place of Jesus'. It sounds appallingly ambitious, even presumptuous, but that is actually what the New Testament suggests we do. Jesus speaks to God *for* us, but we speak to God in *him*. You may say what you want – but *he* is speaking to the Father, gazing into the depth of the Father's love. And as you understand Jesus better, as you grow up a little in your faith, then what you want to say gradually shifts a bit more into alignment with what he is always saying to the Father, in his eternal love for the eternal love out of which his own life streams forth.

That, in a nutshell, is prayer – letting Jesus pray in you, and beginning that lengthy and often very tough process by which our selfish thoughts and ideals and hopes are gradually aligned with his eternal action; just as, in his own earthly life, *his* human fears and hopes and desires and emotions are put into the context of his love for the Father – even in that moment of supreme pain and mental agony that he endures the night before his death. (pp.61-63)