

James D. Whitehead and Evelyn Eaton Whitehead, *Nourishing the Spirit: The Healing Emotions of Wonder, Joy, Compassion and Hope* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2012), 181 pp.

Readers of *Reflective Practice* will be familiar with James E. Whitehead and Evelyn Eaton Whitehead's earlier book, *Method in Ministry*, which has been a staple in theological education.¹ *Nourishing the Spirit* is the Whitehead's most recent book. In this volume, they argue that western Christianity has erred too much on the side of rationality, being fearful of the negative consequences of intense emotions. Only in recent years, under the influence of positive psychology, they suggest, are we beginning to appreciate the value of emotion in the life of the Spirit. In particular, the Whiteheads focus on the value of positive emotions, like joy, compassion, hope, and wonder for enriching and giving passion to our spirituality. If you have read any of the Whitehead's earlier books, you will also appreciate in this volume their warm, direct, and clear style of writing. In examining each of the positive emotions, they draw easily on the Biblical courses of Augustine, Aquinas, Gregory of Nyssa, and then, contemporary theologians and psychologists. At each point they carefully define, clarify, and distinguish the meanings of such "emotions" as joy versus happiness, awe versus wonder, pride versus humility, attachment and love, and compassion and self-care. At points I found their distinctions to be a bit of a stretch, like focusing largely on the positive aspects of anger while ignoring the horrific effects of out-of-control anger. This is a positive, even optimistic view of the human nature. The other deficit from my perspective was an absence of very many "How to's." I was easily convinced that joy, wonder, hope, and compassion are good things and that I could enrich my spiritual walk if I nourished these emotions, but I longed for some practical strategies, or perhaps a clinical vignette or two, that would have helped me implement this nourishment. Perhaps that will come in their next book. Nevertheless, their thesis is a solid one and a corrective voice that needs to be heard in theological academic circles, which tend to emphasize thinking over feeling in the life of Spirit.

NOTE

1. James E. Whitehead and Evelyn Eaton Whitehead, *Method in Ministry: Theological Reflection and Christian Ministry*, Revised ed. (Lanham, MD: Sheed & Ward, 1995).

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