

Women's Liberation, Jesus Style: Messages of Spirituality and Wisdom

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This book is a collection of eight sermons written and preached by eight different African-American ministers, who refer to Biblical stories where women play a central role, like the stories of Ruth and Naomi, and the scene with Jesus' mother at the foot of the cross.

The subtle irony is that the book's title is taken from a sermon preached by a male (Dr. J. Alfred Smith Sr.) and that the liberation he refers to is the liberation of a slave girl-not from her owners but from the demon that allows her to tell fortunes and thereby earn income for her masters. "At that moment, the evil spirit left her. At that moment, which was the greatest moment of her life, she experienced women's liberation-Jesus style." Since further reading of the passage tells how Paul and Silas, who called the demon from the slave girl, were stripped, beaten, and jailed after the slave owners filed a complaint, it leaves the reader wondering just how the slave owners dealt with the girl, who could no longer earn them money.

While some sermons leave the reader wondering how faith translates into practice, many of them, including the one by Dr. Jeanne L. Porter, "It's Time to Make a Change: Breaking Free from the 'Waiting to Exhale' Syndrome" are quite good at using Biblical stories to illuminate contemporary situations. Porter even lays out seven steps for moving out of unhealthy situations.

The strength of the book, however, does not lie in the sermons themselves but in the series of questions for reflection and study related to each sermon. Though Smith's sermon seems less than liberating, the questions that follow are thought-provoking: "What does it mean to be exploited? Have you ever been exploited? If so, how did it make you feel?" Later the reader is asked, "Have you ever observed a situation in which one group of people was exploiting another person or group of people? If so, what did you do?"

The reflective questions were written by the editor, a graduate of Tufts University and Northwestern University's Kellogg School of Management. She currently lives in the Chicago area where she works as lecturer at a local university and as a consultant.

Though it is important to understand that the women's liberation in this book is spiritual, as its subtitle suggests, and not necessarily situational or physical, the questions and meditations provide a strong basis for personal or group study, and the appendix tells how to use it successfully.

PAULA SCARDAMALIA (May / June 2002)

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