

## BOOK REVIEWS

*Running – the sacred art*, edited by Kay A. Warren. Skylight Paths, 2007. 138pp., Pb., \$16.99. ISBN-13: 9781594732270.

Reviewed by Michael Whawell, whawell@tiscali.co.uk

### Keywords

running, spiritual, aspect, rhythm

In this easily-read book, Dr Kay leads us into a running experience in which God, sanctuary, prayer, meditation, pilgrimage and even a notion of sacrament all play a part.

“What do you think about when you are running?” This question has often been put to me. It is impossible to obliterate everything from the mind whilst running; while an *elite* athlete’s head will be full of “split times,” the tactics of fellow competitors, etc., a jogger has a mind that can roam. As running is a repetitive, rhythmical activity this allows for Dr Kay’s central premise to assert itself: that runners can enter a spiritual realm.

A recent *Runner’s World* magazine survey sought to discover why people run. Replies revealed a 50/50 split between those who run for purely athletic reasons, and those who reported that running had a broadly spiritual aspect. For the latter, running brought forth “simple enjoyment,” “stress relief,” “the boosting of self esteem,” “instant calm” and “a sense of purpose.”

So there is clearly much more to running than the common perception that it is only about hours and miles of cold, dark winter slogging, leading to the holy grail of a London Marathon finisher’s medal.

Dr Kay by contrast, leads the reader to sunlit uplands, lightening our running darkness, where God can be present in every stride, and encourages participants to become truly spiritual runners. He himself is an avid runner and a director of theological studies, so what he has to say is born out of his life’s work and experience.

This is essentially a book designed to encourage those who have yet to broaden their ideas about what the simple act of running might hold. For the experienced runner, this book is like meeting old friends: the plentiful quotations, set apart from the text, are all from well-known theologians of running *gurus*. Though familiar, they will have the effect of giving fresh impetus to runners of any standard whose resolve to “get out there” is flagging.