

book reviews

To Live with Christ.

Bo Giertz, trans. Richard Wood and Bror Erickson. St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2008.

The pastoral heart of Rev. Bo H. Giertz (1905–1998) is readily witnessed through this daily devotional volume. Many readers may already know Giertz's main work, *The Hammer of God*, first published in Swedish in 1941 and since translated. Now his devotional text is also available in English through the translating work of Wood and Erickson.

Born and raised in Sweden, Giertz claimed atheism as a youth. It was the grace of Christ that brought him to faith as a young man and then called him as a parish pastor and eventually a bishop in the Church of Sweden. This spiritual path, fraught with struggle, allowed him to mature through the crucible of modern, liberal theological tensions in the Lutheran church in Sweden. This maturity, which is borne out in his devotions, is the same spiritual and pastoral depth which has also earned him the reputation as the "North Star in the Church of Sweden."

To Live with Christ is a daily devotional book which follows a simple outline: brief Scripture reading, one to two pages of commentary or exposition, and a prayer. The reader should allow 15 minutes or so for each devotion.

Giertz follows the church year allowing for a daily liturgical rhythm which will enhance the reader's weekly worship experience. Also included at the back of the book are devotions for special seasons and days such as Thanksgiving Day, St. Michael's and All Angels Day, and even Boxing Day.

Giertz's conservative Lutheran, evangelical style is apparent in each devotion. His love for the Lord and Christ-centered focus is inspiring. This devotional is solidly balanced with attention to Law and Gospel theology. Yet it is the penetratingly reflective style indicative of the author's own personal piety and spiritual journey which draws the reader in. Pastor Giertz addresses, through the Scriptural texts, topics which challenge and encourage life with Christ. Such topics as temptation, confession, faith, the Trinity, doubt, prayer, theology of the cross, Real Presence, the office of public ministry, and stewardship are considered in more than a perfunctory manner. One gains the sense that this author has wrestled with these spiritual themes in the presence of the Lord.

Another notable feature of this text is the particular educational aspect of the devotions. Daily a biblical doctrine is taught and reinforced. This feature caused the translators to conclude, "When you have finished this book, ... you also will have completed a short doctrinal study."

A devotional of this caliber is suitable for the pastor who wants to walk with a brother in the ministry. Certainly DCEs, teachers, and deaconesses will recognize and appreciate a fellow servant who has wrestled with the joys and struggles of walking with others in the journey of life with Christ. Also the devoted adult who is craving spiritual meat on a daily schedule and the spiritually mature teenager will be strengthened by these devotions.

By way of criticism one would only wish for an index of topics and Scriptural references to access more readily the insights and teachings contained within the 830 pages. We hope that more of Pastor Bo Giertz's writings will soon be translated into English.

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The Consolation of Theology.

Edited by Brian S. Rosner. Grand Rapids, Michigan/Cambridge, UK: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2008.

Applied theology faces the challenge of dealing with the struggle of human emotions in the face of life's difficulties. *The Consolation of Theology* is an exploration of six Christian theologians selected from the centuries who were chosen for their personal struggle with a specific human emotion. This book contains a set of six essays written for the Conference on the Consolation of Theology in Sydney, Australia, in 2006 at Moore Theological College, where five of the essayists reside. Each essayist begins with a brief biographical sketch of his selected theologian, which outlines a personal emotional struggle. The biographical sketch is followed by an examination of how the essayist found the Christian source of comfort and resolution for his struggle.

In *Lactantius on Anger*, Richard Gibson shows how Lactantius dealt with the problems of anger as he lived through the persecution of Christians in the early fourth century. He observed that anger is placed squarely within the creation of God, and is a normal part of our lives. In the Christian community, anger ought to be directed at sin, with the Word of Christ protecting us from the excess of anger. Lactantius sees anger at sin as part of the nature of God which is propitiated by the death of Jesus Christ.

In *Augustine on Obsessions*, Andrew Cameron observes from Augustine that the obsessed person's sights focus on some tiny corner of God's good world at the expense of all else. From *Augustine's Confessions* we find that a theological consolation to obsession is living a quiet life in Christ, which opens the way for the Spirit to be poured out in aid. It is the Holy Spirit who radically reorients our affections.

In *Luther on Despair*, Mark D. Thompson examines the struggle with doubt and despair in Luther's life. Luther even coined a term for his black periods, calling them his *Afechtungen*. His periods of despair were not viewed as experiences to be endured, but as opportunities to be embraced. In the face of these attacks of Satan, we have the promise of Christ on which to hold, even in the darkness. Luther often invokes the promise of God in baptism as a shield against despair.

In the Name of Jesus: Reflections on Christian Leadership. Henri J. M. Nouwen. New York: Crossroad Publishing Company, 2002.

In *Kierkegaard on Anxiety*, Peter G. Bolt shows how Kierkegaard's personal struggle with anxiety formed his concept of angst. The Danish thinker distinguishes ordinary fear, which gives some protection from harm, from an agonizing premonition of evil, which has no objective basis. Bolt explores at length the difference between Kierkegaard's understanding of objective anxiety, which is the result of the fall into sin, and subjective anxiety, which is experienced internally when an individual recognizes his or her freedom and all its various possibilities.

In *Bonhoeffer on Disappointment*, Brian S. Rosner explores how Bonhoeffer handled his disappointments as he moved from a life of privilege and prestige to imprisonment and execution. Rosner gleans eight counsels from Bonhoeffer, which include focusing on people in our lives, embracing Godly optimism, finding comfort in the God who "seeks again what is past," and "walking through our disappointments with God."

In the final essay, *C. S. Lewis on Pain*, Robert Banks shows that the purpose of pain is to bring us to the point of realizing our need for God. "God whispers to us in our pleasures, speaks in our conscience, but shouts in our pains." (page 139) This essay explores how Lewis' writings provide a model of grieving as well as an aid to think within and through our feelings when pain and grief come.

This set of essays provides an example of the application of theology to the emotions of life. Many have put great effort into attaining a carefree life, and yet have a sense of being utterly lost emotionally. These essays give examples of the consolation of theology in the midst of human struggle, and would be of value to pastors, teachers and other church workers.

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What is the Christian leader to be like in the 21st century? Drawing on his experience as a Catholic priest, scholar and counselor and using the scriptural accounts of Jesus' temptation in the wilderness (Matthew 4:1-11) and His post-resurrection breakfast discussion with Peter (John 21:15-19), Henri Nouwen offers his thoughts on this question.

Although some who advise Christian leaders may concentrate on developing teaching or preaching skills, programmatic innovations, and effective leadership habits, Nouwen warns that as leaders develop these abilities they may actually be drawn into temptations similar to those Satan devised to assault Jesus. He specifically states they can be vulnerable to the following temptations: to be relevant (temptation of turning stones to bread), to be spectacular and popular (temptation of jumping from the temple), and to be powerful (offering Jesus the kingdoms of the world).

Nouwen describes how he, as a well-known teacher and scholar at Yale, Harvard and other universities, wrestled with the temptation to be relevant. Although living in a different environment, Christian leaders may wrestle with the desire to define themselves by what they can build, show and accomplish. Nouwen, however, reminds the reader that in John's Gospel Jesus did not ask Peter if he was competent. Instead he asked, "Do you love me?"

The temptation to be spectacular and popular can prompt leaders to a "performance attitude" and a "go-it-alone" approach to leadership that can bring recognition and applause to leaders but can also separate them from those they lead. In contrast, Nouwen states that Christian leadership is to be both communal and mutual. Jesus sent his first disciples out in pairs to support one another and keep each other faithful to their calling. And he cites Jesus' command to Peter to "feed my sheep" as a calling to the role of a caring shepherd whose relationships are based on trust and love.

The third temptation of Jesus is likened to the 21st century's leaders' temptation to be powerful and to rule. Using knowledge, position and other advantages, a leader may force those led into compliance. Nouwen comments that the history of the church

is filled with people "tempted to choose power over love, control over the cross, being a leader over being led" (p. 78).

To counter these temptations Nouwen recommends three Christian disciplines. The first, contemplative prayer, is identified as the central discipline as it brings the leader again and again into the presence of God, roots the leader in an intimate relationship with Jesus, and increases dependence on Him. The second, confession and forgiveness, when shared with community, enables not only the leader to care for his or her people, but allows the people to show how deeply they care for their shepherd. The third, theological reflection, calls on leaders to recognize their powerlessness, to be humble, and to approach the realities of daily life with the mind of Christ.

Although Nouwen's comments initially were presented at a conference primarily for priests, this short book of 80 pages speaks to anyone who desires a return to the Source of understanding Christian leadership and guidance in practicing it. Rather than emphasizing new tools or programs, he emphasizes that leaders first should have a life filled with love of and service to God and others. Crossroad Publishing includes a short study guide that makes the book adaptable for personal devotions, team ministry preparation, school faculty workshops and other areas in which Christians are called to lead and serve "in the name of Jesus."

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