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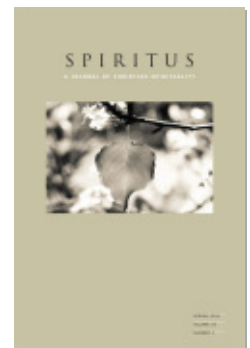
Spiritual Companionship: A Guide to Protestant Theology and Practice by Angela H. Reed, Richard R. Osmer, Marcus G. Smucker (review)

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does it have impressive documentation and historical analysis of a critical moment in our recent spiritual history, but it should also inspire in us a critical questioning of our own work. To what extent does our commitment to spiritual practice out in creation depend upon transcendentalist, Romantic, or some other heterodox commitment? And if so, what is at stake in that commitment? Have we forgotten the scriptural witness of wilderness as struggle, temptation, and death in the wake of John Muir's eloquence? Do we read the transfiguration as complete with the confidence of an anthropocentric salvation from our ecological self-destruction? These sorts of reflective questions should not be received as threatening but rather should help us to separate the wheat from the Chaff in the search for the truth to which we witness. This book, while not without its flaws, can help us ask good questions of our own work as we continue to articulate a concern for creation that remains robustly orthodox in its Christian spirituality and theology.

Devoted to Nature is an accessible read appropriate to undergraduate, graduate, and professional researchers. It would be at home in any historical, sociological, or theological inquiry into American environmentalism.

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Spiritual Companionship: A Guide to Protestant Theology and Practice. By Angela H. Reed, Richard R. Osmer, and Marcus G. Smucker. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2015. 186 pp. \$21.99.

A joint effort by three praxis scholars representing the Baptist, Presbyterian, and Mennonite traditions has occasioned a valuable new resource focused on Protestant spirituality. This work should find its way to the syllabi in practical theology classes in Protestant seminaries as well as to the libraries of pastors and Protestant churches where a deep commitment to spiritually enriched leadership exists. It embraces the concerns of spirituality scholars who, in the words of Anton Boisen, study "living human documents." By shifting the focus from spiritual direction to spiritual companionship, while continuing to draw upon the insights of classics in the field, the authors have provided an approach to spiritual life, which is focused not simply on individuals but also on small groups and congregations.

This shift, though not dramatic, addresses a number of issues. Over the past three decades significant numbers of Protestant clergy and laity have been trained as spiritual directors through highly respected programs at Roman Catholic retreat houses or in other ecumenical training centers. Anecdotal evidence suggests that many who train as spiritual directors never go on to provide direction to others. Hence, one can hypothesize that they have sought this training to increase their understanding of spirituality and to deepen their personal prayer life. Spiritual companionship offers an alternative way to provide practitioners with background and training in spirituality, is less formal than traditional one-on-one spiritual direction, and has as its focus the wider life of the congregation. This book offers clergy and laity with the gifts for spiritual companionship a number of avenues for this ministry.

The book's introduction provides widely accepted definitions of key terms common in the literature: spiritual guidance, spiritual direction, and spiritual friendships. Spiritual companionship is defined as "a way of accompanying others in intentional relationships of prayerful reflection and conversation that help them notice God's presence and calling in their personal lives, local communities and the world." Each of the book's seven chapters explores the various ways in which spiritual companionship has the potential to transform small groups, congregations, narratives of everyday life, the metanarrative journey of life, and the practice of spiritual direction. Each of these arenas is explored through a framework common to all chapters: understanding the cultural context, listening to Scripture, mining the Protestant tradition, practicing spiritual companionship, exploring stories of congregations, and engaging exercises for developing spiritual companionship skills.

The authors draw on Robert Wuthnow's insights in support of a practice-oriented approach to spirituality as contrasted to either a dwelling-oriented spirituality (more institutionally focused) or seeking-oriented spirituality (concerned primarily with an individual's quest). The emphasis on practices has a number of advantages: it offers a means for entering into a relationship with the living God who continues to speak today, it grounds one in the tradition from which the practices arise, and, if taught, used, and supported in a congregational context, it encourages both solitude and community. Drawing generously from Dietrich Bonhoeffer's insights, spiritual companionship is understood as a spiritual practice as well as a ministry where other spiritual practices are valued as a means to faithfulness by integrating both the personal and the communal aspects of faith.

Spiritual practices are sprinkled throughout the book and introduced in a manner to appeal to Protestant communities who may be skeptical at first blush of practices used by Christian traditions outside their orbit or whose origin predates the Reformation. The authors recognize that members of their three Protestant traditions are accustomed to Bible study as the primary means of faith development. They encourage readers to explore their spiritual lives using a variety of practices such as *lectio divina*, daily examen, Luther's Four-stranded garland, spiritual autobiography, and clearness committees. Using metaphors (for example, life as a river) for personal reflection is also recommended. The practices are often described in the book's narrative sections, but each chapter includes a set of exercises, which allows for practice and skill development. An annotated bibliography with references for further exploration concludes each chapter. These bibliographies include classic texts from an array of sources, including Roman Catholic, Anglican, and various evangelical and mainline Protestant traditions.

Spiritual companionship requires skill sets from both the social sciences and theology. Drawing from active listening training the authors demonstrate the importance of non-judgmental listening where deep trust is cultivated in a relationship of genuine caring. One means of building such relationships involves learning to ask strategic, open-ended questions about matters of faith. I especially appreciated the key questions laced throughout the book, sometimes in the text and often in the practice sections, that helped both individuals and groups notice God's on-going activity. Examples include: "What are some key moments in your spiritual life over the years?" "How do you think God feels about your pain?" "Where do you sense God's presence in our small group?" The intensity of the questions that John Wesley used with his small groups (bands) are included—"Do

you desire to be told of your faults?”—to demonstrate the level of intimacy Wesley sought to develop among his members. The authors acknowledge that while most contemporary church members would not desire this level of intimacy in a small group, much healing does occur in twelve step programs where such honesty and transparency is the norm.

The distinction between life cycle theory and life course theory for the purpose of spiritual companioning is introduced in the chapter on life’s journey. While life cycle theory explores predictable patterns common to various stages of life, life course theory explores the impact of specific events and the social context in shaping one’s personal narrative. This approach has the advantage of minimizing essentializing by not only exploring life events and turning points in a person’s life, but also by placing that life in the context of its various religious, social, and familial communities. The authors are clear that spiritual companioning is not “therapy lite,” but seeks to deepen one’s faith.

The authors note that not infrequently persons of faith are reluctant to discuss their spiritual experiences because they fear such experiences are odd or open to ridicule. Spiritual companions must remain open to non-judgmentally receiving these stories so that those sharing are able to connect with others about their deepest spiritual experiences. The theological anthropology which informs the context of this book understands people as social beings seeking genuine connections with themselves, others, and God. However, technological tools like iPads and Blackberries that discourage in-depth conversations shape the contemporary cultural context. Thus, a dilemma: humans are wired for meaningful relationships but frequently find the need frustrated. Spiritual companioning is one way to address this need.

The Christological focus found in the “listening to Scripture” section of each chapter is heavily informed by Richard Peace’s interpretation of Mark’s Gospel. His view of atonement—with an emphasis on the need for Jesus to suffer and die to ransom humanity from sin and death—results in believers coming to the realization that they must take up their cross and follow Jesus in a life of discipleship. Spiritual companioning is viewed as having implications for evangelism, namely, carrying the Good News to all creation. The conversion narratives of the Puritans, Wesleyan emphasis on holiness, and Baptist testimony are all referenced as spiritual practices that can be furthered through spiritual companioning. The value of spiritual companioning as it is presented, however, can easily be affirmed with other theological interpretations of Scripture. The book could be used in a variety of praxis focused seminary classes. Those with more liberal theological beliefs could encourage their students to identify their own theological positions and explore the way their beliefs influence their approach to and expectations of the ministry of spiritual companioning.

The final chapter explores the role of spiritual companioning in the lives of clergy who are frequently in need of support, yet whose competitiveness contributes to personal and professional burnout. This chapter also helpfully outlines a number of ethical and practical considerations congregations committed to spiritual companioning must consider. While these issues are too numerous to cover in depth, the bibliography provides well-established resources to pursue.

The major omission in this work is its lack of case study material that draws on the insights and practices of racial/ethnic faith communities. White communities

of faith are recognizing that they cannot assume as normative the ethnicity their privilege has traditionally afforded them. Thus, case studies in the book, which are generally used to demonstrate an insight from the text, would benefit from including more people of color.

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From Despair to Faith: The Spirituality of Søren Kierkegaard. By Christopher B. Barnett. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2014. 215pp. \$39.00.

As Christopher B. Barnett notes in this fine study, Harold Bloom's definition of genius as "capacious consciousness" certainly describes Søren Kierkegaard, famed not only as a philosopher but also as a poet, theological writer, and social critic. Nonetheless, important features of Kierkegaard's life and work still suffer neglect, and one of those is Kierkegaard's spirituality. Barnett's aim is ambitious: not only to appreciate Kierkegaard as a "spiritual writer" but "to treat Kierkegaard's oeuvre as a place where one's relationship with God can be illuminated and deepened" (xvii).

In what sense is Kierkegaard a "spiritual writer"? Building on his earlier book, *Kierkegaard, Pietism and Holiness* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2011), Barnett in chapter one explores the Pietist and Moravian background of Kierkegaard's upbringing and his fondness for Pietist writings, not only by Pietism's father, the Lutheran Johann Arndt, but also, through Arndt, Kierkegaard's "cautious" appropriation of medieval Catholic mystical writers such as Johannes Tauler and Thomas à Kempis. This Pietist background gave Kierkegaard a central concept that defined the purpose of his entire authorship: "upbuilding" (Danish *opbyggelse*), aimed at aiding his reader's spiritual development and love for God.

Yet within the totality of Kierkegaard's writings, one finds two narrower strands of Kierkegaard's more directly spiritual literature, first, the "humanistic" spirituality of the *Eighteen Upbuilding Discourses* (1843–44) that Kierkegaard published under his own name to accompany his many pseudonymous writings, and second, his more explicitly Christian articulation of the nature of God, sin, and the imitation of Christ, following the 1846 publication of *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*. Barnett argues, correctly in my view, for complementarity rather than rupture between the "humanistic" and "Christian" strands in Kierkegaard's spiritual literature. Here Barnett notes similarities with two other classical spiritual writers, Bernard of Clairvaux and Meister Eckhart. With them, Kierkegaard envisions a twofold approach to spirituality: "an intrinsic human desire for that which brings fulfillment, as well as . . . the Christian claim that the triune God can best satisfy this desire" (19).

In chapter two, Barnett develops in more detail this basic claim of a progression from human longing to divine fulfillment by exploring Kierkegaard's understanding of God, self, and the spiritual journey. Barnett identifies Kierkegaard with the classical *exitus-reditus* (exit-return) theme in Christian thinking (but without its Neoplatonic tendencies), and agrees with Lee C. Barrett's recent argument that