

Book Reviews

Michael Ford (Ed)

The Dance of Life

Spiritual Direction with Henri Nouwen

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This book is designed to be a companion on the journey of faith. It is attractively presented, and it will be of great benefit if used devotionally. The subtitle may perhaps give the impression that it is a manual for spiritual directors, but it is in fact intended for a much wider readership. It is a rich anthology of spiritual readings, drawn from the writings of the Dutch priest Henri Nouwen, who is probably best known to English readers as the author of 'The Return of the Prodigal Son'.

The editor has selected passages from 27 books by Fr. Nouwen, in order to provide content for consideration relating to various stages and crises in the life of a Christian. The themes include coping with anxiety, emotional loneliness, and 'befriending death', as well as other hurdles encountered in the spiritual pilgrimage.

Throughout the book the reader will find a penetrating understanding of human nature, and most people will discover that many of the passages will speak directly to their own condition. Fr. Nouwen writes from a psychological perspective, and yet he is refreshingly Christocentric. He emphasises the need for inner silence and the contemplation of Jesus.

Three brief quotations will illustrate something of the flavour of the book:-

"Fear is the great enemy of intimacy. Fear makes us run away from each other or cling to each other but does not create true intimacy."

"Joy is hidden in sorrow and sorrow in joy. If we try to avoid sorrow at all costs, we may never taste joy."

"A spiritual life in the midst of our energy-draining society requires us to take conscious steps to safeguard that inner space where we can keep our eyes fixed on the beauty of the Lord."

The whole book is a treasure of spiritual riches. It needs to be read slowly and meditatively, and to be inwardly digested over a period of time.

Martin SSF