

# HIGHLIGHTS OF A FAITH

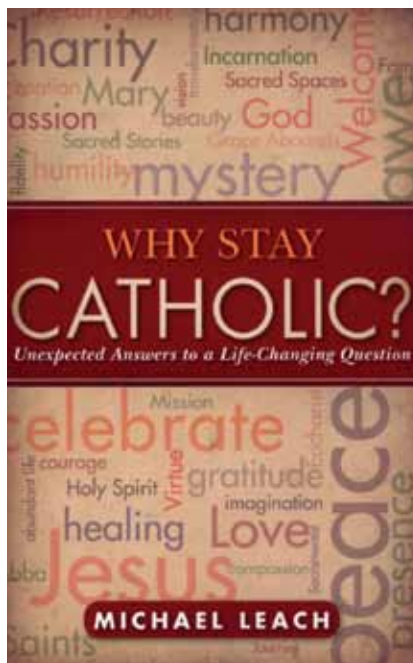
REVIEWED BY LAURA RICHTER, M.Div.

Michael Leach, editor-at-large and publisher emeritus of Orbis Books, clearly spent much of his life in dialogue with great Catholic thinkers. His deep love of Catholicism and valued relationships animate *Why Stay Catholic?* Leach addresses a variety of different audiences along a continuum, including cradle Catholics struggling with church challenges to outsiders wondering why people stay Catholic. Regardless of where a reader is on the spectrum, many will find helpful and inspirational material in this book.

*Why Stay Catholic?* is divided into three major sections that organize a wealth of material. The first section gathers ideas or basic tenets from Catholicism. Next is a collection of holy people who Leach thinks embody some of the best of what Catholicism has to offer. Lastly he finishes with sacred places, showing how organizations also reveal the presence of God.

In the section comprising the first 150 pages, Leach covers 25 different ideas about God and Jesus (everything from “God is everywhere” to “Jesus died for our sins”), as well as the communion of saints and holiness of Mary. He discusses a variety of spiritual realities including sacramental imagination, mysticism, biblical stories, fruits of the spirit, guardian angels and everyday spirituality. He also pays some attention to church organization, subtitled the chapter on the papacy, “It’s a Tough Job but Somebody’s Got To Do It.”

The chapters are short, but within six to 10 pages, Leach weaves together a thoughtful combination of biblical texts, basic information, supporting quotes and personal stories. Addressing believers, Leach reminds us that the church is made up of individuals, the church can and does change and we



**WHY STAY CATHOLIC? UNEXPECTED ANSWERS TO A LIFE-CHANGING QUESTION**  
 BY MICHAEL LEACH  
 Loyola Press, 2011  
 343 pages, \$14.95

don't have to believe everything to stay Catholic.

Leach then introduces us to 15 Catholic friends. He features a couple of well-known individuals like Medical Mission Sister Miriam Therese Winter, Sr. Thea Bowman, FSPA, journalist Dorothy Day and Fr. Andrew Greeley, as well as some personal friends who include writers, lawyers, inner-city workers, spiritual guides and a bishop, each of whom has profoundly touched Leach's life. Each chapter offers brief personal background and explores the person's work and thoughts about the treasures of Catholicism. Leach often includes links at the end of these chapters so readers can learn more.

The final third of the book explores sacred places where God is found. Leach mentions specific spots like Old St. Patrick's parish on Chicago's Near West Side and Gethsemani Abbey in Trappist, Ky. He then considers institutions focused on ministry, including Catholic Charities, Catholic hospitals and Catholic schools, and then moves to outreach organizations like the Catholic Church Extension Society and Catholic Relief Services.

Leach also cites Catholic books and bookstores and the Los Angeles Religious Education Congress as “places” where grace abounds. Each of these chapters remind us God is found in a variety of places and countless people are dedicated to creating room in these spaces for people to encounter God's love.

Leach does an amazing job incorporating a plethora of thinkers and Catholic concepts, packing each chapter with an almost unbelievable amount of information. He clearly is working to answer the question himself, often ending chapters with some variation of the statement, “this is why I stay Catholic,” and he has pondered each of his subjects at length.

My only criticism is I found the chapters overwhelming. I left many feeling I was trying to drink from a firehose. For example, in eight pages dedicated to those he calls saints, Leach offers some supporting information from Fr. Ronald Rolheiser, OMI, and Orbis Books Publisher Robert Ellsberg, then unveils a group of people that span the ages, including: St. Joseph, Mary, Mary Magdalene, Hildegard of Bingen, St. Thomas Aquinas, St. Bonaventure, Brother Lawrence, St. Alphonsus Liguori, St. Therese of Lisieux, Gandhi, Archbishop Oscar Romero, Oskar Schindler, Flannery O'Connor, Blessed Mother Teresa and Cardinal Bernardin.

All great and holy people — but much to digest in eight pages.

*Why Stay Catholic?* is a nice exploration of a variety of themes and characters from Catholicism as well as a reminder how places also make God's love real. The book is great for those

looking to learn more about Catholicism as well as those questioning why they remain Catholic. Regardless of what brings a reader to this book, he or she will undoubtedly leave with many thoughtful insights about the faith and many reasons why one might want to

stay Catholic.

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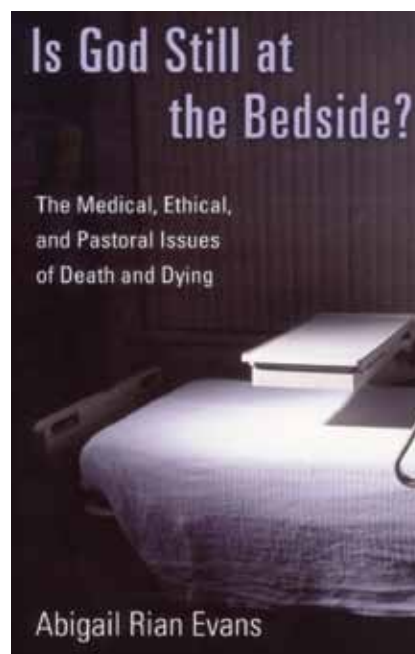
# PRACTICAL THEOLOGY IN TIME OF DEATH AND BEREAVEMENT

REVIEWED BY PATRICK McCRUDDEN

**I**s *God Still at the Bedside* is a carefully organized and thorough account to which author Abigail Rian Evans brings a distinguished career as a pastor, theologian, teacher and administrator. Recently retired from Princeton Theological Seminary, she consistently combines careful philosophical and theological scholarship with empirical data and the lived experiences of patients, families, health care professionals, pastors and others involved in the care of the sick, dying and bereaved. Evan's text is comprehensive in its scope, well researched and documented while simultaneously filled with enough narrative and vignettes to make the reading consistently lively, interesting and thoroughly practical.

Evans explores a familiar enigma. Ours is a nation with deep religious roots, and these roots have contributed much of the language and ideas that inform and support our common beliefs around death and dying and the morality of end-of-life decisions. But as death has become more medicalized, the experiences of dying, death and bereavement have lost their connection to a practical theology that can make sense of pain, suffering and death and give guidance to the moral questions that frequently arise at the end of life.

Early in the text, Evan's observes, "There are many people who believe



**IS GOD STILL AT THE BEDSIDE?  
THE MEDICAL, ETHICAL, AND PASTORAL  
ISSUES OF DEATH AND DYING**

BY ABIGAIL RIAN EVANS

Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2010  
502 pages, \$30

in God, but when they address serious illness or death, they turn solely to the medical profession and do not try to understand how God is involved." Obviously this statement is a generaliza-

tion, but, I believe, a generalization that she adequately illustrates with careful observation and empirical data. When the remedies of medicine were few and often all the medical profession could do was provide supportive care while an illness ran its course, the role of the church and practical theology was evident in the care of the sick, dying and bereaved. With the advances in medical science in recent decades, dying and death have moved death from the home to the hospital and often exclude family, faith and other values in deference to medicine's laudable goals of preserving and extending life.

Just one example that will be familiar to many is the practice of keeping family from the emergency room or intensive care unit to allow the medical team room to practice. Evans shares several stories of how a medicalized death leaves the patient isolated from family members at the hour of death and leaves the bereaved with additional trauma from these last experiences. This kind of attention to the lived experiences of patients and families continues throughout the text.

The book itself is comprehensive in its scope. It begins with a prologue examining philosophical and theological concepts around human life and then moves to an analysis of contemporary attitudes towards death (including a

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