

Close to Our Hearts: Personal Reflections on Marriage. Edited by Aldegonde Brenninkmeijer-Werhahn and Klaus Demmer. Münster: LIT, 2013. Pp. iii + 218. €24.90.

From founding members of the International Academy for Marital Spirituality (INTAMS) in Belgium comes this timely new collection of brief essays on marriage. The authors (mostly European theologians) present for the next generation a spirituality of marriage grounded in experience. Among the essays are real gems—particularly those by Thomas Knieps-Port le Roi, Enda McDonagh, Ilse Cornu, and Elizabeth Davies. Notable themes include the enduring otherness of a spouse, the ongoing yearning for unity, the adventure of entering into a lifelong covenant, the reality of suffering, the need to accept imperfection, and the profound gift of being in relationship with one person for a lifetime.

In the introduction, editor Brenninkmeijer-Werhahn writes of a younger generation “searching desperately for testimonies, practical guidance, and points of orientation” (2) and promises a book that “illustrate[s] the value and difficulties of a lifelong relationship in its various facets” (3). More than most theological works on marriage, this book delivers. It takes seriously theoretical discussions of marriage as it relates to the Trinity, domestic church, and total self-giving, while attempting to show what Christian marriage looks like from the inside.

Some of the book’s best moments come when authors use literature (for instance, *Revolutionary Road*, *The Odyssey*, *On Chesil Beach*) and down-to-earth language (such as “stickability,” that quality that helps couples choose to seek reconciliation again and again because “we cannot imagine life without this person” 188). The most successful authors push beyond traditional formulas, using what they have come to know through experience to describe marriage in its fullness and advocate for its endurance.

Twenty-five years after the founding of INTAMS, it remains difficult to say true things about marriage. Theologians, like artists, novelists, and filmmakers, speak more easily of courtship, adultery, and divorce than of the “in-between” of marriage, where the ordinary and profound coexist. Those who are willing to make themselves vulnerable in attempting to speak of the “in-between,” even when words will always seem inadequate, do a great service for the church.

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Stations of the Heart: Parting with a Son. By Richard Lischer. New York: Knopf, 2013. Pp. 251. \$25.

Toward the end of his deeply moving account of his son Adam’s dying and death, Lischer writes, “It occurs to me that I have acquired a new responsibility. I have become the interpreter of his death” (238). In this volume, L. has assumed this mantle

of responsibility and offers the reader an exquisitely rendered testament to and interpretation of Adam's life, dying, and death. In this stylistically elegant account, L. invites the reader to be present on the 95-day journey from Adam's call alerting L. that his cancer had returned to his death at 33, days shy of his daughter's birth. Written seven years after Adam's death, the book concludes with reflections on L.'s ensuing experience of grief, understanding of God's presence in suffering, and enduring love for Adam, manifest in efforts to remember him "in a saving way" (7).

This important work should be a helpful addition to any course concerned with suffering, grief, dying, or religious coping. Ministers and others will want to recommend it to those confronting the unthinkable: accompanying one's child to death. At the same time, one will want to make this recommendation sensitively. Adam's remarkably intentional and faithful approach to his dying may leave some readers feeling that their own journey—or that of their loved one—has been inadequate or disappointing by comparison. Also, for those immersed in grief and uncertain or fearful as to its trajectory and outcome, a fuller account of L.'s long journey of grief could be beneficial. These concerns aside, this work is significant in its unflinching look at what we might wish to avoid but what many must live as their reality. It is emotionally devastating at times, and yet so is life. L. has modeled how not to run from or seek to make premature sense of devastation, but rather to embrace it fully, allow it to shatter one's heart, and then hold on tenderly to every piece, waiting in hope and trust for the new shape of one's life gradually to emerge.

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