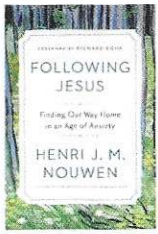


read

FOLLOWING JESUS

By Henri J. M. Nouwen (Convergent Books, 2019)



This book reminds me of a day when my karate teacher announced to the black belt students, “Today’s lesson is ‘how to make a fist.’” It’s normally a lesson taught to beginners, but it was his way of saying, “You never outgrow fundamental practices.”

Following Jesus is written simply and covers Christian basics, but each word is undergirded by the author’s extraordinary legacy of scholarship and personal struggle. Written “at one of the lowest points in Henri Nouwen’s life,” it is a compelling reminder that the primary truths of Christ’s gospel suffice for our deepest needs.

Chapter 1, “The Invitation,” beckons the reader from a “dangerous world full of violence” into the enveloping shelter of God our “Infinite Mother, Loving Host, Caring Father.” Then Chapter 2, “The Call,” draws readers from a “scarcity mentality”—epitomized by walls we build against our imagined enemies—to a place where each person embodies God’s love in their own unique manner. Next, Chapter 3, “The Challenge,” centers on Nouwen’s well-known wounded healer metaphor: We suffer from the wound of not being fully loved, and the remedy is God’s unlimited love.

In Chapter 4, Nouwen gently leads the reader to face the cost of the gospel: “Take up your cross,” which means to have the courage to see your pains. “The Reward” leads the disciple from a rigid and fearful life where “security concerns make us all dead before the bombs explode” into the flexibility of living joyfully. He concludes with Chapter 5, “The Promise,” prescribing practices of prayer and service to enable freedom from fear.

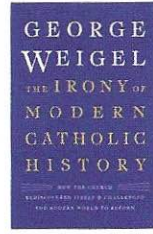
Reading this book in 2019, which certainly qualifies as an age of anxiety, renewed my desire to live each day following Jesus.

—Kenneth McIntosh

read

THE IRONY OF MODERN CATHOLIC HISTORY

By George Weigel (Basic Books, 2019)



In 1861 Pope Pius IX famously condemned the idea that he should “come to terms with progress, liberalism, and modern civilization.”

Within a century, however, the Catholic Church had become a champion of all three. In the wake of World War II, Catholic political parties helped a shattered Europe embrace a market economy and liberal democracy. Pope Paul VI called for the benefits of technological progress to be shared with the developing world. In the 1980s Polish citizens welcoming a Polish pope chanted “We want God!” and lit a spark that ultimately led to the collapse of communism across Eastern Europe.

In his new book, *The Irony of Modern Catholic History*, George Weigel argues that the church’s response to modernity was more creative than is generally recognized. He highlights the contributions of important Catholic reformers of the 19th and 20th centuries like Pope Leo XIII, who defended the rights of workers; philosopher Jacques Maritain, whose Christian humanism influenced the United Nations’ Universal Declaration of Human Rights; and theologian John Courtney Murray, whose work led to the Second Vatican Council’s path-breaking Declaration on Religious Freedom.

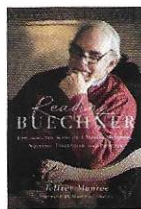
Weigel’s treatment of these figures is thoughtful and balanced. It helps the reader understand how the church’s approach to the challenge of modernity evolved over time. As Weigel approaches the present, however, his writing takes on a more polemical tone. He is among those who worry that Pope Francis is sowing confusion about settled Catholic teachings.

This was, of course, precisely the charge leveled against many of the reformers whom Weigel now embraces. It is a reminder that the work of reading the “signs of the times” is an ongoing project and that only future historians and theologians may be able to separate the wheat from the chaff.

—J. Peter Nixon

briefly noted

Reading Buechner:
Exploring the Work of a Master Memoirist, Novelist, Theologian, and Preacher
by Jeffrey Munroe
(InterVarsity Press, 2019)



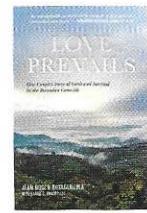
Munroe introduces the life and work of Christian writer Frederick Buechner, focusing on his most essential writings.

Silence Can Kill:
Speaking Up to End Hunger and Make Our Economy Work for Everyone
by Arthur Simon
(Eerdmans, 2019)



Simon encourages citizens, churches, and governments to cross partisan lines and work together to erase world hunger and poverty.

Love Prevails:
One Couple’s Story of Faith and Survival in the Rwandan Genocide
by Jean Bosco Rutagengwa
(Orbis Books, 2019)



Rutagengwa shares how faith sustained him and his fiancée during the Rwandan genocide in 1994 and its aftermath.