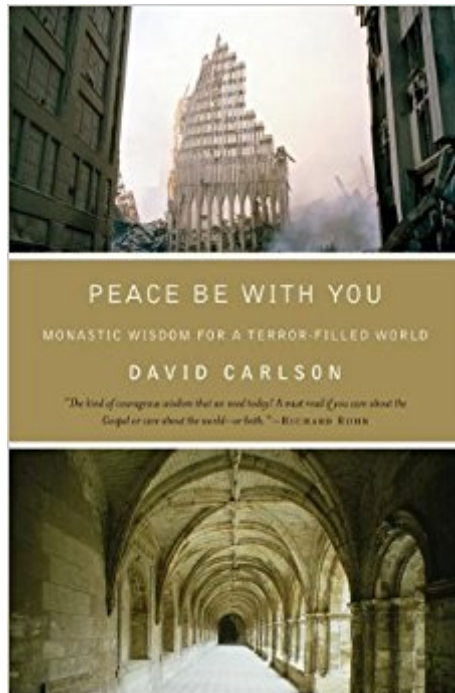




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Peace Be With You: Monastic Wisdom For A Terror-Filled World



Synopsis

“If revenge and retaliation are the best responses that our nation could muster after 9/11, then Jesus did not have to come, live among us, and preach a radical understanding of neighbor that includes the enemy. In the wake of the ten-year anniversary of 9/11, as tensions rise between Christians and Muslims, author and religious studies professor David Carlson seeks guidance in the modern-day deserts of monastic communities across America. Are Christianity and Islam destined to confront one other as clashing civilizations? *Peace Be with You: Monastic Wisdom for a Terror-Filled World* clearly answers “No.” *Peace Be With You* is the result of more than thirty interviews with abbots, nuns, monks, and other seekers at monasteries and retreat centers. Carlson reveals the untapped wisdom of these men and women in their own words as they speak with hope to a suffering world. Follow the author on this personal, moving, and at times difficult journey, and discover a new yet ancient basis for genuine peace between Christianity and other religions—especially Islam. “It is time for Christians to use their power to change the conversation,” Carlson says, “to ponder Jesus’ command to treat the stranger as our neighbor and to treat our neighbor not only as ourselves, but as God in our midst.” As Carlson reminds us, there is another thing stirring around the world. There is a movement of extremists for love and for grace that have been singing a different song. “One of the richest, most insightful, and most instructive books I have ever read on the business of living the Christian life fully, biblically, faithfully, and non-dogmatizedly.” —Phyllis Tickle

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Customer Reviews

As we approach the 10th anniversary of 9/11, one valuable tool to enable persons of faith to reassess the meanings of both the horrendous events of that day, as well as attitudes and actions taken in response to those events, would be a reading of David Carlson's "Peace Be With You." Carlson's text generously invites us into a journey filled with revelations of many sorts as we follow him on his own pilgrimage to be with and hear 'a word of life' from contemplatives from a variety of American monastic communities. Yes, this volume is relevant and powerful on many levels, but I would have to say that I was struck by the important theological questions and insights considered within it. As every reader of "Peace Be With You" will readily realize, the centrality of the Christian doctrine of 'Incarnation' is lifted to us, with layers of meaning unveiled through some of his interviews. Heavily influenced by the writings of Thomas Merton, Carlson will offer Merton's 'epiphany' on the corner of Fourth and Walnut Street in Louisville as not only relevant to reflections upon 9/11, but as a 'watershed moment' for Carlson's post-9/11 incarnational thinking about God and humanity. I was very intrigued by and have much to ponder from the discussion Carlson relates with Brother Christopher of New Skete on the theology of the cross and the paschal mystery in relation to the 9/11 events. How God responds in the face of violence, and our own possibilities in similar instances, was striking. How to interpret, trust, and live from the values of love and forgiveness in a world filled with suspicion, fear, hatred, and violence of all sorts requires something akin to a 'vow of conversation' like Merton's, or a commitment to a 'dialogue of experience' such as that embraced by Sister Mary Margaret Funk. The disciplines required to keep one's eyes "on a different horizon, one that has left room for Jesus' radical message of love of neighbor and enemy" (p.90) is a decision, not a feeling. It is demanding and radical, and one must have mechanisms in place--those of persevering contemplation and supportive community, among others, to even have the possibility that may permit "spiritual sanity that could hold our world together" (p.129) But don't think that you will find an abstract theological treatise in "Peace Be With You." Again, this is a narrative of a pilgrimage of sorts, to a variety of locations made sacred because of the sacred character of the persons with whom Carlson interacts. Herein are the discussions, from New Mexico to New York State, from Collegeville and Kentucky, and even from Beech Grove, Indiana, (not too far from Carlson's own Franklin College)--discussions with real 'flesh-and-blood' human beings whose views and reflections show the diversity of personalities and perspectives, but who show us

the profound gifts that these persons, immersed within the monastic tradition of the Christian faith, all offer us through the practice of their spiritual disciplines. We are reminded of our world's woundedness, and ways in which God is working (incarnational ways!) to heal us in our brokenness. In this wonderful book, we are also led into the struggles that Carlson shares with honesty and thoughtfulness that places a human face on monastics who face 'the cloud of unknowing' and upon professionals of all types whose 'Roman arch' weakens and may collapse. This is an engaging work, and the reader will find depth that is thought-and-emotion-provoking' on more than one level. You, too, will be moved not only by the theological/instructive quality of this book, but by its personal and gentle guiding us through the conversations and commentary of the author. So, what of 9/11? Are the questions of 'why?' and 'where was God?' simply matters of the past to move beyond, and our propensity toward dualistic thinking inevitable? Have we missed a 'kairos' moment, and lost the opportunity to demonstrate a gospel power of forgiveness rather than a worldly habit of vengeance? Can there still be healing, God's healing, as we become a bridge between peoples, seeking creativity of spirit in our actions? Carlson brings hope to the discussion, a hope grounded on a God whose commitment is 'pro nobis,' whose mechanism involves a cross (over which we trip), and whose promise is that the light overcomes the darkness. Carlson's text affirms that people of faith can embrace a new sort of listening, and say 'yes' to a new way of living. Fully seeking this kind of love, these acts of forgiveness, this commitment to dialogue has yet to be realized post 9/11 in many communities in America. Carlson writes, "God has given humanity the solution, but we have yet to learn how to practice that solution" (p.110) He goes on to ask, "What would happen in our world if, for just one human second, we would be given the grace to see our neighbors--the leaders of this world, the radio talk show crazies, and our own enemies in that light of truth? (p.113) Will it give pause to peoples and nations 'hell-bent' on retaliation and revenge? Will it move us beyond the 'Us/Them' chasm that permits us to generalize and dehumanize? Resurrection people, monastic and otherwise, have to believe it makes a difference. There is a 'word of life' we should utter as we come together to remember this September 11th. I plan to host a book discussion this fall on this provocative text by David Carlson on our university campus. It's a valuable resource, worth your time, as well.

As I read this work, I found myself taken back to September 11 in a new way. Throughout the interviews with the many monks and nuns that David Carlson recounts emerged a feeling that there were other ways, deeper ways, to respond to evil and suffering in this world. Though there was no hagiography about these individuals, I found that they were working in realms of how to see and live

in this pained world differently. One of the threads throughout the book is that those outside monastic communities often see these communities in ways that let us dismiss them as irrelevant to the "real world." As Carlson says: "A persistent stereotypes of monks and nuns is that they are persons living in such isolation as to be out of touch with the realities of this world." Instead, those living the monastic life are dedicated to holding the world in prayer, friends and enemies alike. In reading the accounts, the connection of prayer to the "real world" becomes more clear and profound. This book's style flows nicely, and it might be compared to a travel adventure, though the traveling repeatedly connects the inward and the outward. Carlson talks of his impressions of the physical settings for the monasteries he visits, the feel of the place, and so the connection of inner prayer and the outer world is made more clear. He also reflects on his own impressions and those of his son who traveled with him to a number of the communities. So, the book takes us on a spiritual adventure that seems deceptively easy to enjoy. However, as one reads the depth of the adventure slowly and steadily catches us. As Carlson says of his own deepening exploration, his adventure was "a call to a new way of living." Thus, the "terror filled world" is also recognized as full of prayer, compassion and a reality not overcome by horrid violence and fear. Carlson closes the book with a quote from Rumi, the Muslim seer and poet: "Not Christian or Jew or Muslim, not Hindu, Buddhist, sufi, or zen. Not any religion or cultural system. I am not from the East or the West, not out of the ocean or up from the ground...My place is placeless, a trace of the traceless. I belong to the beloved, have seen the two worlds as one and that one call to and know, first, last, outer, inner, only that breath breathing human being." Carlson wonders what difference it might of made had Osama bin Laden hearkened to such a vision. I wonder what difference it would make if Christians were able to more deeply understand Jesus' parables about the Kingdom of God, such as Mathew 18: 1-5: 'At that time the disciples came to Jesus and asked, 'Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?' he called a child, whom he put among them, and said, 'Truly I tell you, unless you change and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. Whoever becomes humble like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. Whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcome me.'"

Lonnie Valentine
Professor of Peace and Justice Studies
Earlham School of Religion

I appreciate how David Carlson has taken the time to look at different views of our terror filled world. What causes "terror"? What is our response to terrorists? How do terrorists view us? So many thoughts are presented and many questions to ask oneself. I am only 2/3rds finished with book and find myself with many notes I want to share! A worthwhile read; you will find yourself questioning

your views on others as you find peace in the world.

Although many consider monasticism an anachronism, monastics are not isolated from the world. They are involved in the world, and often monks and nuns see more clearly than those of us who immediately react to something. The monastic response to the events of 9/11 are more thoughtful, more measured, and--shall we say?--more holy than ours. Their call to pray and to forgive resonates in the Christian heart. I was most grateful for this book.

A wise seeker after truth visits a series of monasteries, seeking wisdom for the correct reaction to 9/11 and an antidote to American war-mongering

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