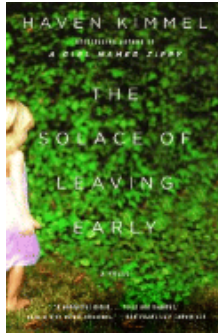


CIRCUITRIDER Reviews



The Solace of Leaving Early

by Haven Kimmel (Anchor Books, 2003)

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Reviewed by Jack Keller, Publishing Consultant, Project Director of The New Interpreter's Bible.

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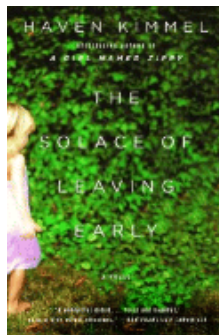
What a delight it was to discover Haven Kimmel's novel *The Solace of Leaving Early*, which uses an eloquent and spell-binding story of death and life and love in small-town Indiana to explore a bigger picture of theological mysteries and philosophical illumination. Kimmel draws us into the narratives of thirty-something Amos Townsend, a small town pastor with an intellectual bent but gentle of spirit, eager to share theological truths with his parishioners, but haunted by his own doubts and skeptical of his parishioner's capacity for nuanced understanding. Kimmel draws us simultaneously into the story of Langston Braverman, an intellectual young woman who walked away from a Ph.D. program in English, a student of literature secretly attracted to voices in philosophy of religion and philosophical theology, returning home as a beloved daughter ill-equipped for ordinary life.

These two lives are first entangled and then intertwined because of their mutual compassion for two little girls who call themselves Immaculata and Epiphany. The little girls are orphaned survivors of domestic violence, and find in Amos and Langston unlikely caretakers, who find themselves as they learn about suffering and grief, providence and redemption.

Kimmel explores life by means of narrative, but narrative follows the lives of persons shaped by ideas and great thinkers. A.N. Whitehead

appears more frequently than anyone else, but Kimmel's characters enjoy frequent ruminations about the insights of Frithjof Schuon, Charles Hartshorne, Teilhard de Chardin, John Cobb, David Griffin, and a host of other theological luminaries. The novel presents a process way of seeing and living the world. We are told of "the miracle that simply is: the world coming into concreteness again and again" (6). Amos's "favorite, most fundamental understanding of God" has to do with God's primordial and consequent natures (33). Radical human freedom, which God takes into the divine self, "lures us toward truth, beauty, and goodness" (34).

In the midst of horrendous loss, comfort is found in the realization that God desires beauty and goodness, the harmonious resolution of contrasts (39). That lure toward beauty is found in the incarnation of God in every occasion (173). We live in a complex matrix of possibilities, choosing some and foregoing others, our lives beginning and ending in the mind of God, where nothing is lost that can be saved (39, 276).



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