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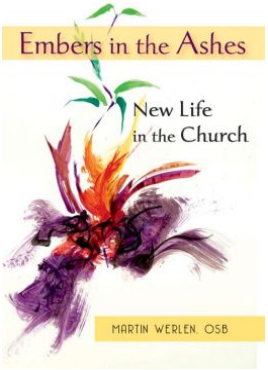
Swiss abbot's 'fiery appeal' available in English

Dennis Coday | May. 1, 2013 NCR Today



Last October, Swiss Abbot Martin Werlen of Einsiedeln Monastery was asked to give a lecture to mark the 50th anniversary of the opening of the Second Vatican Council. Werlen did much more than deliver a paper. When Vienna-based journalist Christa Pongratz-Lippitt **wrote about the talk for NCR** [1], she described it as ?a fiery appeal for church reform [that] ? has attracted widespread attention throughout Europe.?

Werlen said he is alarmed by the present state of the church, which he compared to an ash heap, but an ash heap that he knows contains embers waiting to be ignited. ?The situation of the church is dramatic, not only in the German-speaking countries,? he said. ?It is dramatic not only because of the rapidly decreasing number of priests and religious or because of plummeting church attendance. The real problem is not a problem of numbers. What is missing is the fire! We must face the situation and find out what is behind it.?

Werlen himself hoped to supply some of that fire. ?The thoughts offered here are to be a provocation,? he wrote. ?The term contains the word vocation, a call or calling. And the pro- clearly stresses that the calling is to be challenged and shaped in positive ways. These thoughts want to move things. They want to be a pro-vocation. They want to encourage our common search for the embers under the ashes so that the fire may burn again. Jesus Christ himself uses the image of fire in order to describe his mission: ?I came to bring fire to the earth, and how I wish it were already kindled!? (Luke 12:49).? Some highlights:

?Critique is legitimate, indeed necessary, in the church. Sacred Scripture itself attests to it.?

?People of a conservative bent try to salvage what they can. ? They celebrate the faith in small groups and lament the world?s trends. ? The danger of such conservatism is ? it threatens to turn the church into a museum piece.?

?The progressive danger lies in uncritically embracing change and thereby being swept away by modish trends. The church becomes superfluous.?

?Today the church is highly polarized between conservatives and progressives. ? One side denies the other?s ecclesial validity. ? Trench warfare does not promote enthusiasm. It separates. It cripples.?

As soon as we reported on Werlen?s paper, readers began asking for an English translation of the nearly 9,000-word document. I am happy to report that Paulist Press has the paper available in English. The e-book version of *Embers in the Ashes: New Life in the Church* by Abbot Martin Werlen became available on Barnes & Nobel [2] and Amazon.com [3] as well as other e-book outlets last month. The print copy of the book should be available by the middle of this month. Check on www.paulist press.com for details.

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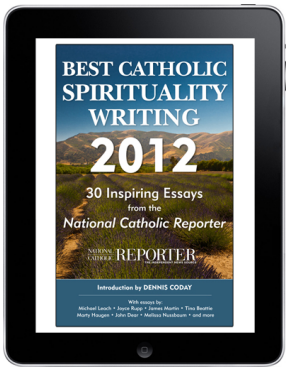

I am very happy to tell you about another e-book that I am hoping you will want to buy as well. *Best Catholic Spirituality Writing 2012* is an e-book collection of the finest spirituality essays published in the National Catholic Reporter during 2012.

The 30 essays appear in roughly liturgical season order and include pieces by Mike Leach, the editor behind NCR?s Soul Seeing column; NCR columnists Jesuit Fr. John Dear, Michael Sean Winters, Melissa Nussbaum, Heidi Schlumpf and Nicole Sotelo; and a score of other Catholic writers like Joe McHugh, James Behrens, Joyce Rupp, Claire Bangasser, Fran Rossi Szpylczyn, Tina Beattie and musician Marty Haugen.

Best Catholic Spirituality Writing 2012 is available now on the Apple iBooks store, Amazon [4], Barnes & Noble [5] and other e-commerce sites [6]. See **NCRonline.org/ebooks** [7] for more information.

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