

Sacred Time: Embracing an Intentional Way of Life

by Christine Valters Paintner

Notre Dame, IN: Sorin Books, 2021
160 pages, CAD\$21.07, GBP£12.19,
USD\$16.95

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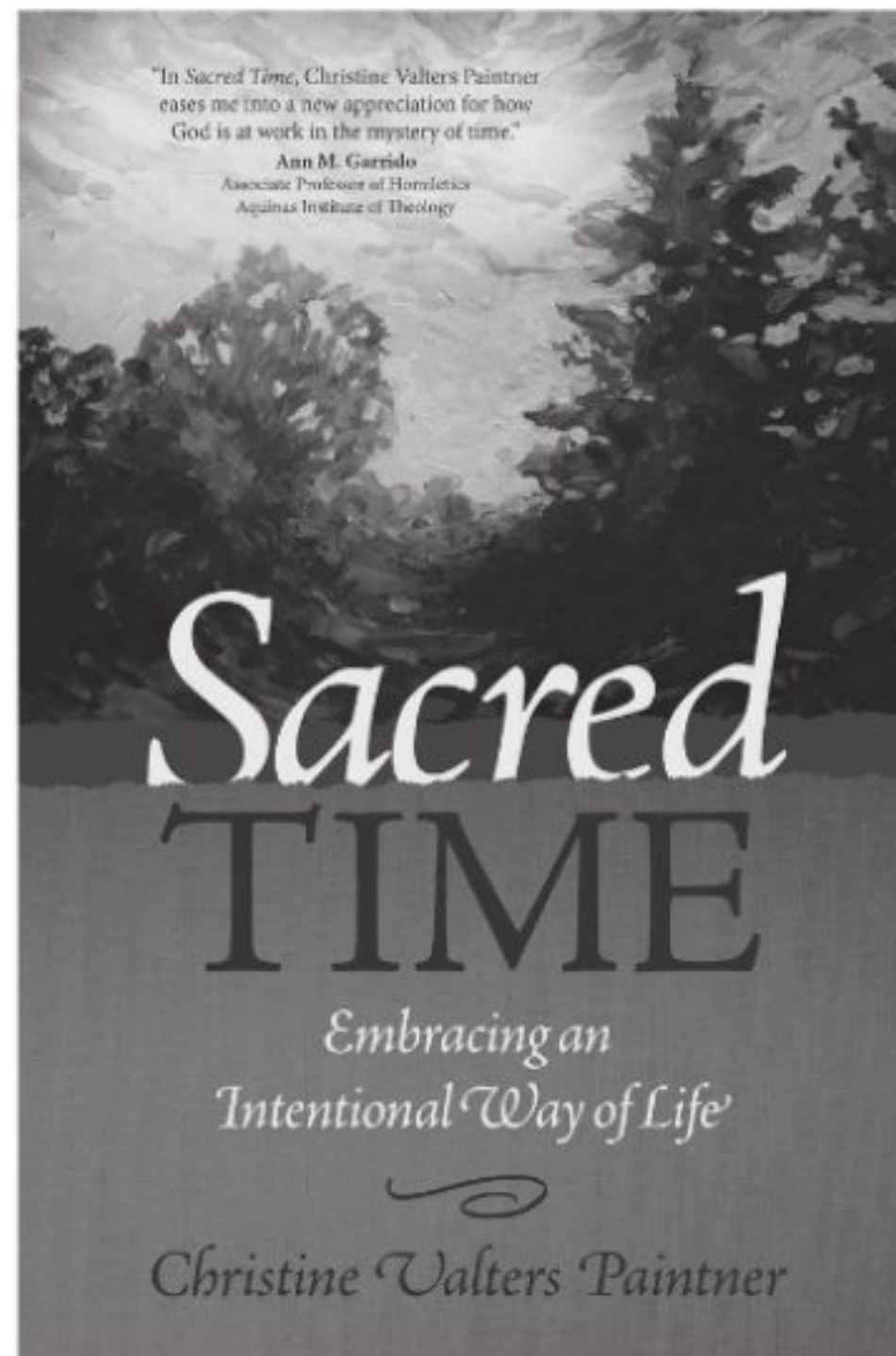
“Years ago,” writes Christine Valters Painter, “I had a wonderful spiritual director who would ask me this simple question when I was in the midst of discernment: ‘What is this season for?’ It was a profoundly freeing question because it honored the fact that my life had varying seasons, times when certain things were called for and other things needed to be released” (86). In *Sacred Time: Embracing an Intentional Way of Life*, Paintner, abbess of the online Abbey of the Arts, invites us to enter into the seasons: of the breath, day, week, month year, lifetime, generations, or cosmos with a profound respect for the thresholds of deeper awareness they offer us.

Seasonal time then becomes a portal into “sacred time,” which Paintner describes as “time devoted to the heart, to the things that matter, to wonder and beauty, to catching glimpses of eternity” (xix). This is a book to be read slowly. Those familiar with the author’s other books on spirituality will recognize how, once again, each of her eight chapters includes five sections. First, she offers her reflection on the theme, followed by a scripture reflection by her husband John Valters Paintner. This is followed by experiential exploration through a meditation and creative practice.

Each chapter then concludes with a blessing in the form of a poem illuminating that particular aspect of time.

To use Paintner’s word, what “shimmered” for me, personally and as a spiritual guide, was how the four-part breathing rhythm she advocates actually reflects the four-part rhythm of the seasons with their movements of blossoming (inhale) fruitfulness (hold), release (exhale), and resting (hold). Paintner highlights how we experience this during the day as well with the four hinges of dawn, day, dusk, and dark and in the lunar cycles of waxing, fullness, waning, and darkness. She offers a treasure trove of other possible practices to try ourselves or to offer to those whom we accompany. I was most intrigued by *lectio divina* with the moon as our sacred text, and a guided body examen prayer for the Sabbath on the life-giving and life-draining moments of one’s week.

In our ministry to those who “live in a breathless world” (xi), we owe it to our integrity to allow Painter’s notion of “sacred time” to inform us as spiritual guides: “This is the heart of our relationship to time: First we experience its cyclical rhythms so that we aren’t rushing toward deadlines and the end of things but instead always moving toward new beginnings as well. Second, we experience a more expansive and present way of being in the world, where we might touch and taste eternity more often. Eternity is not something that happens after we die; eternity also exists here in all the glorious spaces where we lose track of time because our hearts are so full of wonder



and delight. God is a God of circles and rhythms, inviting us always to fall fully into this moment” (133). ■

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