

Safe Haven of Jesus: A Testimony of Faith and Prayer

Steve Turnwald

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Safe Haven is a challenging inspirational book that imparts some exciting ideas.

Steve Turnwald's unconventional faith development book *Safe Haven of Jesus* has a strong mystical edge.

Safe Haven is an organized compilation of three previous works—*Holy Hill*, *Surmounting Our Woes*, and *Fatherhood*. Its central idea is that it is possible to train the mind to direct thoughts toward Jesus and attain some level of perfection or grace. Its central image is the “synapse”—the connection between human beings and God. Beginning with a general discussion of the synapse, the book considers common Christian themes like loving-kindness, creativity, and heaven abounding.

The book's more unusual ideas are not adequately explained, though. Organization is diffuse, and diversions from the topics at hand—into space for prayer, or for self-referential comments—make it difficult to follow ideas through to their conclusions. Arguments are not forwarded in a thorough or convincing way, even if some of their elements seem groundbreaking or compelling.

The book includes a careful consideration of the human condition, down to theologically rare issues like hormones and bodily excretions as some of the many and various ways to connect to God. Seeking to become part of the “Christmind” is also explored in an atypical way. The book declares that mind wars with itself; this concept is more nuanced than the conventional sin/grace dichotomy. Such intriguing notions are introduced but never fully explored.

The book functions most consistently as an extended meditation on Christian faith—specifically a Catholic faith. The pope and church writings are frequently cited. It is a patchwork of prayer, worship, and readings from wisdom literature.

The writing has a sermon or lecture quality, complete with references to source materials. A semiautobiographical tone dominates; Turnwald's personal challenges, including an extended stay in a mental hospital, are included. They shut the book off from being universally accessible, though. In its focus on the author's experiences and faith, the book becomes increasingly esoteric.

The text is given to asking and answering its own questions, and its connections become loose. Its strong consideration of discipleship, which suggests that discipleship is born of a willingness to achieve blessings from God through virtue, quickly gives way to less cohesive considerations, and consistent narrative energy is not maintained.

The book's material repeats and doubles back on itself; it comes to feel like an extended ramble. Mystically minded, it seeks to move beyond the established corridors of thought and tradition, but its lack of focus makes it tough going.

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JEREMIAH ROOD (July 31, 2018)

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