The Blossoming of the World: Essays and Images

Brian H. Peterson
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The Blossoming of the World has an epic title that matches its subject matter. From savoring the simple joy of eating breakfast near a sunny window to experiencing the palpable flow of divine love in a moment of dread, Brian Peterson is on a quest to ask the deepest questions. Throughout this series of first-person essays peppered with selections from his journal entries, the author courageously delves into his own experiences of fear, love, faith, and even violence.

Each chapter hinges on an experience that opened up more significant questions for the author and ends with a revelation about one of life's paradoxes. The book thus reads somewhat like a series of modern parables, with a lesson at the end of each, albeit one that is often sort of horrible. For example, Peterson examines violence in nature, in humans, and in himself in "Categories of Violence." He follows a personal inspection of deep-rooted anger with this thought: "I was torn apart and now I'm knitted together… . The violence in my soul troubles my dreams… . The deepest wounds never heal. But I am healed. But I am broken, will always be broken. I am healed." Peterson is acknowledging that he is both drawn to—and horrified at locating in himself—the violence he sees around him. While this candor has the potential to make some readers uncomfortable, it also frees one to join in self-examination instead of forging a frightening path without company.

While the author's excellent writing could stand alone, his photographs throughout are at once visceral and ephemeral. Much of the subject matter is nature-related and presented in muted colors: tree bark here, a shadow there. In every case, images framing the subject matter help to contextualize the reader's journey through this book by adding emotional texture.

This volume would sit well on a shelf stocked for those exploring the meaning of life, the integration of faith, and the world's difficult truths. (I know, it's a tall order.) It is also an excellent example of how well art can coexist with writing.

In the end, the author concludes that our greatest difficulties are worth the trouble because of love: "Being shredded down to scraps … and being filled up by love … that's life." And so it is, how the world comes to blossom.

GABRIELA WORRELL (July / August 2011)

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