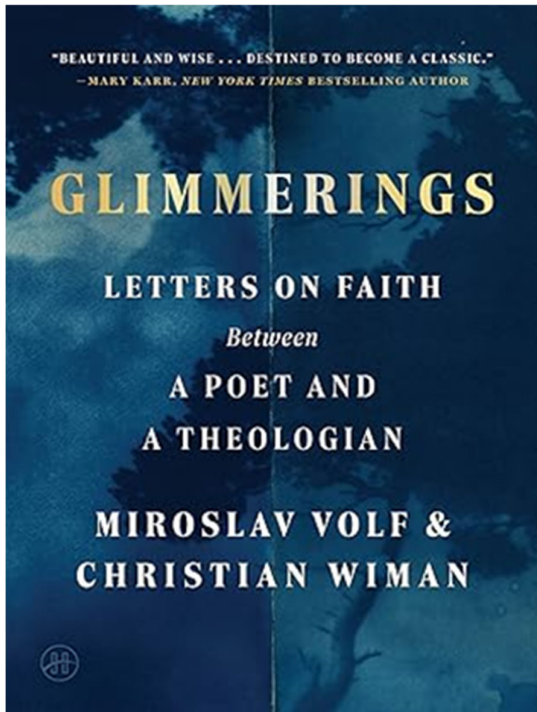


Miroslav Volf & Christian Wiman, *Glimmerings: Letters on Faith between a Poet and a Theologian*. New York: Harper One (An Imprint of Harper Collins Publishers), 2026. Pp 255.



*Reviewed by
the Rev Dr Stephen Sharman*

This short but excellent theological book consists of a number of email letters which were exchanged between two good friends who are also university professors. Miroslav Volf is the Henry B. Wright Professor of Theology at the Yale Divinity School in the USA. He is also the founding director of the Yale Centre of Faith and Culture and the author of many books about theology. Christian Wiman is the Clement-Muehl Professor of the Arts at the Yale Divinity School in the USA, a poet and the author of many books. The two of them were in the habit of going on regular walks where they discussed items of mutual interest and especially their faith. For a time, they could not continue their walks, and the email letters became an acceptable substitute. The publication of their correspondence is most welcome. We gain thereby a glimpse of a friendship and an insight into their theological thinking.

The two authors discuss various aspects of their Christian faith. They talk about the sources of their faith, its role in their lives and their struggles with doubts and certainties. They are very honest with each other. This reviewer is reminded sharply of St Augustine's *Confessions*. In an illuminating

insight, Christian Wiman confesses faith, for me, is an instinct above all else. Poetry is ravelled up with this (p. 227). An instinct is rooted deeply in a person's life and being. An instinct is also a product of education and environment. Later, he adds that theology "grows out of an experience of God" (p 228). As we experience God, we come to understand Him and to believe in Him.

In the course of their letters, we find the two writers referring to various authors. We find Martin Luther, Master Eckhart, Dierich Bonhoeffer, Austin Farrar, William James, Jan Assmann, Charles Taylor, Friedrich Nietzsche, Jurgen Moltmann, Bernard of Clairvaux, Carlos Eire and others. Poetry is an important part of their correspondence. They quote from Rainer Maria Rilke, Stevie Smith, George Herbert, John Milton, Richard Wilbur, Gerald Manley Hopkins, Philip Larkin, TS. Eliot and others. There is one reference in the book which surprised this reviewer. The authors refer to the Book of Common Prayer (the Anglican Church's book of worship). Miroslav Volt remarks "how I enjoy praying liturgically, saying the words of the good old, beautiful and deep Book of Common Prayer" (p. 213). This remark appears in a discussion of prayer and is a reminder of the intimate connexion of prayer with theology. This book is very erudite, a product of the thinking of two well-read theologians and professors.

The basic source for Christian theology is the Bible and the two authors refer liberally to it. Among the books of the Bible which they refer to we find Romans, Matthew, Exodus, 1 Corinthians, Psalms, Mark, John, Philippians, Luke, 1 John, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Genesis. The Bible for them is both a source for their understanding of their faith and also a stumbling block which they must encounter and understand. It is especially intriguing to examine how each of them deals with portions of the Scriptures that each one of them finds difficult. Putting these portions of the Bible to one side and ignoring them is not always a good policy.

The conviction the God is love is present in their correspondence. For example, Miroslav Voth writes that "there are passages in the Bible-both in the Torah and in the New Testament – that I cannot square with the claim that God is love, and yet I think that one can responsibly claim the entire Christian faith rests on it" (p. 222, 1 John 4.8).

This not a work of Orthodox theology. While it is true that they talk about the role of the Bible in their faith, they spend little time on other sources of Orthodox theology such as the Fathers of the Church, Icons and the Liturgy. Nevertheless, the book is worth our attention and reading. We meet two sincere, thoughtful, committed Christians whose understanding of their faith may strengthen our own faith.

About the reviewer: Father Stephen Sharman is a priest at St. Nicholas parish in Narol, Manitoba. He received his PhD from the University of Wales Trinity Saint David in 2013. The title of his dissertation was *Visions of Light in the Writings of the Venerable Bede*.