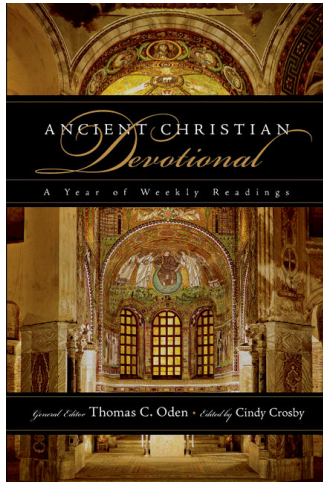


AN INTERVIEW
WITH
CINDY CROSBY



Cindy Crosby is editor, with Thomas Oden, of the *Ancient Christian Devotional*. She is also the author of four books, including *By Willoway Brook: Exploring the Landscape of Prayer*. Her writing has appeared in numerous publications, including *Books & Culture*, the *Mars Hill Review* and *Publishers Weekly*. She frequently speaks and teaches on the relationships between faith, writing and the natural world.

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Q: Why a devotional focusing on the teachings from the early church fathers?

Cindy Crosby: There is a longing by many people of faith to return to the roots of their beliefs. I've seen this with my own two grown children, one who is Orthodox and the other who is considering becoming Catholic. Why? They long for a sense of groundedness. A sense of tradition. They are weary of the hype of the newest, the latest and the most cutting edge. There's a restlessness, a sense of "where did my faith come from?" The *Ancient Christian Devotional*, with its timeless words from those ancients who laid the foundations of our faith, is a way to begin tapping into our roots. Also, the *Ancient Christian Devotional* is a lovely way for those who enjoy using the Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture series to incorporate it into their prayer and devotional life.

Q: How is the book structured?

Cindy: The book loosely follows cycle A for the liturgical year, beginning with Advent in 2007. It has 52 thematic sets of readings: Scriptures from the Old Testament and the New Testament, and a Gospel passage to meditate on for the week. Following each Scripture are three or four selections from the Ancient Christian Commentary series that speak to that Scripture. At the end of the Scripture and commentary selections is another beautiful ancient prayer to close the devotional time. There are several ways to use the devotional. Some readers may want to read through the whole devotion at the beginning of the week. Others might read a little bit each day. Readers can go at their own pace.

Q: Who is the audience for this book?

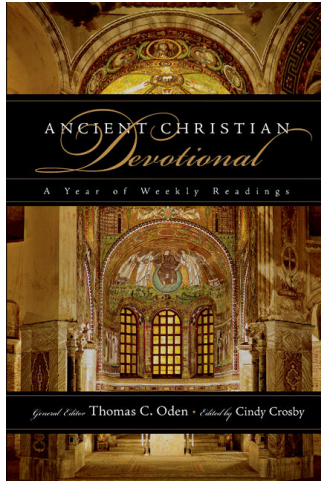
Cindy: You might be Episcopal or you might be Southern Baptist. You could be an academic, or a brand new Christian wondering about the origins of your faith. It doesn't matter. The *Ancient Christian Devotional* has something for all Christians who are interested in the foundations of their faith. Meditating on Scripture is a beautiful way to frame our days and our weeks. For those who are looking for an accessible and non-intimidating introduction into the writings of the church fathers, this is a great place to start. More academic users will enjoy encountering "old friends"—the ancient church fathers whose writings are excerpted.

Q: How can the early church fathers help our devotional lives?

Cindy: There is a deep well of ancient wisdom that many Christians have never dipped into. We read the modern writers, but are unfamiliar with the very writers who have shaped our faith. The *Ancient Christian Devotional* is a way to drink from that well; it's an introduction to the past, a gateway. And meditating on Scripture is a wonderful way to become centered on what is important each week. When you frame your days with Scripture, it can change your life. Drink deeply! The writings of the church fathers are thirst quenching in a way that no modern writing can substitute for. There are also many beautiful ancient prayers that begin and end each week's selection that have been, for the most part, lost to modern readers. The words practically sing on the page.



INTERVIEW
CONTINUED . . .



“Readers will find a sense of community in these pages—a link with a chain of believers that stretches across the years. In this way, we can strengthen our own faith, and are able to take it forward and pass it on to our children.”

—Cindy Crosby

Q: Who are some of the church fathers quoted in the book?

Cindy: As I worked on the devotional, I confess I fell in love with Ambrose. One of my favorites of his writings is excerpted in the Christmas week readings. He writes of Jesus, *“He was a baby and a child, so that you may be a perfect human. He was wrapped in swaddling clothes, so that you may be freed from the snares of death. He was in a manger, so that you may be in the altar. He was on earth that you may be in the stars. He had no other place in the inn, so that you may have many mansions in the heavens. He, being rich, became poor for your sakes, that through his poverty you might be rich. Therefore his poverty is our inheritance, and the Lord’s weakness is our virtue. He chose to lack for himself, that he may abound for all.”*

Q: Anything else?

Cindy: There are some great metaphors, such as this one from Gregory the Great: *“As soon as a slight breeze blows on a reed it bends away. What does the reed represent if not an unspiritual soul? As soon as it is touched by praise or slander, it turns in every direction.”* I also appreciate some of the poetic writings of Clement of Alexandria. In an early shepherd hymn I included in the devotional, it reads *“Bridle of colts untamed, over our wills presiding, wing of unwandering birds, our flight securely guiding. Rudder of youth unbending, firm against adverse shock, shepherd with wisdom tending, lambs of the royal flock.”* And many of the ancient prayers are absolutely gorgeous. As I went through the old prayer collections and the Ancient Christian Commentaries, looking for ancient prayers, I came across this one from Columbanus, a Celtic abbot: *“We ask nothing other than that you give us yourself. For you are our all: our light, our salvation, our food and our drink, our God. Inspire our hearts, I ask you, Jesus, with that breath of your spirit.”* How can you read these ancient words and not be moved? They will change the way you look at your faith.

Q: What did you learn personally from editing this book?

Cindy: When I read the words of the ancient believers who wrestled with many of the same doubts about their faith as I do, I felt a sense of connection and communion with all believers. There was a sense of belonging to something old and deep. As a writer, I am used to solitude, doing it myself, being a loner. Community in this way was welcome—and a surprise. I was also struck by the beauty of some of the words of the ancient fathers, as well as the relevance of their words to my life today.

Q: What do you hope people will take away from reading this devotional?

Cindy: The *Ancient Christian Devotional* will introduce new readers to the vast riches of writing that underpin our faith; that give it structure and beauty and depth and meaning. Readers will find a sense of community in these pages—a link with a chain of believers that stretches across the years. In this way, we can strengthen our own faith, and are able to take it forward and pass it on to our children. There are so many lovely writings here—I hope readers who are new to them will get a taste for the church fathers, and then say “I want to read more.” In this way, the *Ancient Christian Devotional* might be a springboard to an investigation of the other writings of the early church and the lives of the church fathers.