10.20378/irb-92766

CC BY NC ND

Book Review

Nicolas Dreyer
Otto-Friedrich-University, Bamberg

January 2024

Leithart, Peter. *Fyodor Dostoevsky* (Christian Encounters Series). Nashville, Dallas, Mexico City: Thomas Nelson, 2011. 193 pp. ISBN 978-1-5955-5034-7. $9.49/€6.40.

Peter Leithart's short biography of Fyodor Dostoevsky presents a vivid and accessible introduction to the life and creativity of the great Russian writer, which might well complement reading lists for courses on Dostoevsky. The biography is constructed by way of fictionalised conversations of Dostoevsky with his contemporaries, in particular with his close friend Apollon Maikov. The conversations with Maikov, while set in 1888, regularly give room to flashbacks, thereby sketching out not only Dostoevsky's life, culminating in his speech at the Pushkin festival in 1888, but also engaging with the social and philosophical setting which affected Dostoevsky's writing. The reader thereby gains acquaintance with the issues that preoccupied Dostoevsky. These include his approach to the notion of freedom, his concerns for Russian society, for finding the middle way between Westernizers and Slavophiles, and his striving for true humanity in Christ. The work also points to Dostoevsky's various personal encounters including his rivalry with Ivan Turgenev, and his nation's literary heritage that influenced his artistic views, such as, most prominently, that of Aleksandr Pushkin and Nikolai Gogol. The minutely referenced sources used in this work for its representation of Dostoevsky's conversations include a variety of Dostoevsky's fictional and autobiographical works, his second wife Anna's autobiographical accounts, and a number of scholarly works, such as Joseph Frank's *Dostoevsky: A Writer in His Time* (2001) and William Leatherbarrow's *Fyodor Dostoevsky* (1981), among others. Leithart's small volume offers low-threshold, very readable and enjoyable access to the intellectual and theological world of this preeminent Russian writer.