

New Books on Spirituality

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First, two reprints, one of an undoubted classic, Brother Lawrence's *Practice of the Presence of God*, in Donald Attwater's excellent translation, with a relatively new introduction by Dorothy Day. This must be the most attractive English edition available now. It may be doubted whether Cardinal Suenens' *A New Pentecost?* will survive the test of time, but it is likely to endure long enough to justify its new paperback edition. (For a review of the original edition, see *New Blackfriars*, November 1975).

There is also an anthology of the Cardinal's dicta compiled by his devoted biographer, Elizabeth Hamilton, *Ways of the Spirit*, and this makes a pleasant book to dip into, and could be used as an aid to meditation.

The SPCK offers us a new edition of Bishop Appleton's *One Man's Prayers*, revealing a generous and trusting spirituality, expressed in simple prayers which many might find helpful on occasion.

John Gunstone, *The Beginnings at Whatcombe* is a lucid and readable account of the growth of one of the more convincing communities to emerge from the "charismatic movement" in this country, and offers wise advice about the difficulties of living together in community without simply fleeing to naive supernaturalism.

Like Gunstone, T.G.A. Baker in *Questioning Worship* invites us to aim at more "creative worship"; he is severely critical of current liturgical reforms, both Anglican and Catholic, though seemingly unaware of the immense gap between the declared intentions of the reforms and experienced results to date. His criticisms of the banality of modern liturgical English are sensitive, but he goes too far, to my mind, in preferring to leave almost everything to the inspiration of celebrants and participants.

Pray every Day is a real instance of "creative worship"; it consists of a sort of mini-office for every day from Advent to the end of Eastertide, with commons for saints' days, and a few for special situations, with scriptural and non-scriptural readings and prayers, excellently selected by the authors—two Anglican priests and one Catholic.

Also from Collins is a paperback edition of their best-seller, *Mister God, this is Anna* surely one of the most exhilarating and inspiring "spiritual" books of the decade. The paperback edition

contains all the pictures too!

Another book which has already made its mark is *Poustinia* by Catherine de Hueck Doherty, a book of christian wisdom, rooted essentially in the Eastern traditions of Russian spirituality, but directed at the hectic world of North America, where, the author believes, "silence, solitude and deserts" are more vital than ever. The authentic voice of the gospel is heard here, with its demand that we take up our Cross and follow Christ beyond the comfortable world of even spiritual success.

In similar vein *Reaching Out* by Henri Nouwen warns us against definitive "solutions" to our life problems. The author masterfully exposes the essential drama of life, from which we constantly run away, the drama of loneliness, which must become creative solitude; of anxious hostility which must become hospitality; of illusion, which must become prayer. In the middle of our various "dark forests" we must learn how to hope, to reach out in courage and faith, to our truest self, to others as real people in their own right, and to the living God. This is a spiritual book one can warmly recommend to anyone looking for real support, not for magical successes.

In spite of its title, *A Staircase for Silence* by Alan Ecclestone does not seem to me to penetrate nearly so far into the mystery of life, though as an exercise in "going for a walk with Péguy" it is not without interest.

Jean Vanier has established himself as one of the leading present-day spiritual teachers, and the two volumes offered by Gill and Macmillan *Be not Afraid*, and *Followers of Jesus*, will be welcome to many who feel inclined to lose heart in their battle with the nitty gritty; in former days, they would both have been designated books of "homilies", with the nuance of "chat" not wholly absent.

H.A. Williams' *Becoming What I Am* is a simple and sensible book about prayer (do not be misled by the title into expecting more). Prayer is a thoroughly realistic occupation, because "God is never found in the folksy. He is found only in the commonplace." But perhaps one can be *too* sensible?

In *I am with you* Céline Mangan O.P. offers us a series of meditations on God, based on scripture treated as a kind of "photograph album where we are given an inkling of what God is like in sudden photo-like flashes of inspiration". If there is little that is original in the book, familiar truths are expressed in an enthusiastic way which could well help people, perhaps especially those looking for a short book for spiritual reading.

Fully Human, Fully Alive by John Powell S.J. is one of those books Americans seem to like, full of pretty pictures and diagrams, and telling us to win victories over ourselves and "walk into a new and fuller life". Home truths in glorious technicolor.

If the slogan of a decade ago was "prayer pays" or "the power

of positive thinking”, relaxation is the current panacea, with the “hard physiologic data” now associated with such things as TM to make it all respectable. Benson and Klipper’s *The Relaxation Response* is a medical account of hypertension and the response to it by means of relaxation, with a vast sweep of religious citations to back it, and a total lack of interest in anything beyond adaptation to our modern milieu. Therapeutic, maybe; but spiritual only in the manner of the worst kind of twentieth century pharisaism.

Much more acceptable is Peter Russell’s *The TM Technique*, which is as clear an exposition of Transcendental Meditation (the technique of no-technique) as can be given in print (it is always insisted that personal instruction is essential for the would-be practitioner), and a convincing attempt to situate it both with regard to mental and physical health, and with regard to traditional spiritualities, particularly those of eastern religions.

Klemens Tilmann’s *The Practice of Meditation* is an attempt to integrate Zen-type meditation into an over-all scheme of christian spirituality. The result is certainly not the “complete manual of Christian meditation and prayer” alleged by the publishers; it is, in fact, rather bizarre, with its solemn suggestions about how to meditate on, for example, a loaf of bread. If one can survive the oddness, and overlook the solemn didactic style of the author/guru, and assuming that one is drawn to an oriental style of meditation, there is quite a lot in the book that is suggestive (and it is not meant to be taken too dogmatically), especially in connexion with natural meditation; but it needs to be balanced by a more developed teaching on grace, and, I suspect, a more personalistic kind of prayer, which would allow us to cry to a loving Father precisely in our experience of spiritual incompetence.

Those who like their Christianity spiced with mildly occultist speculation and a strong bias in favour of mysticism (in much the same sense as that word is used by the various “-osophists”) will no doubt greet Martin Israel’s *Precarious Living* with ready enthusiasm.

There is more mysticism too from the Sheldon Press, including a reprint of Margaret Smith’s *Introduction to Mysticism*, first published in 1931. As an anthology of quotations, it has some charm, but it is really no longer quite decent to go on as if one could treat of mysticism as a single phenomenon common to all cultures and religions, just as if Zaehner had never happened.

Stephen Clissold’s *The Wisdom of the Spanish Mystics* is a very lightweight compilation of dicta and anecdotes from the Spanish mystics (including, curiously, Rose of Lima), with an equally lightweight introduction, more historical than spiritual, and with an unfair allegation that Dominicans “remained intensely suspicious of all manifestations of mysticism”, except for Luis of Granada. Who would have guessed that St. Teresa’s chief director was the great

Bañez?

Rather more serious is Kenneth Cragg's *The Wisdom of the Sufis* in the same series, though here too I wonder how much is gained by such very brief extracts from spiritual writers.

Irmgard Schloegl's *The Zen Way* is a welcome change from popular Zen, concerned as it is to keep it rooted in its cultural context in Japanese monasticism and its religious context in Buddhism.

Paul Guérin's *I Believe* is a catechism for adults, in the form of a commentary on the Creed. It faces honestly the problems posed by modern scriptural studies and by the doubts and difficulties of "modern men and women", in a way that is not glibly "contemporary", though it is likely to leave some readers disappointed if not actually shocked at some points, especially in connexion with the Resurrection (Christ's and our own). It suffers from the common assumption that "modern man" is impervious to genuine metaphysical needs, and so preserves to the full the voluntarist, anti-intellectualist bias that has characterised Catholic piety for such an appallingly long time. And I suspect that the "simple unfaithful" will feel, if they ever read it, slightly cheated, as they were by *Honest to God*.

THE PRACTICE OF THE PRESENCE OF GOD, (by Brother Lawrence; trans. Donald Attwater, with Introd. by Dorothy Day. Burns & Oates, 1977. pp. 126 £1.95)
A NEW PENTECOST? (by Cardinal Suenens. Collins (Fountain). 1977. pp. 239 95p).
WAYS OF THE SPIRIT, (The Spirituality of Cardinal Suenens, edited by Elizabeth Hamilton. DLT. 1976. pp. 124 £1.20). ONE MAN'S PRAYERS, (by George Appleton. SPCK. 1977 pp. 89. £1.25). THE BEGINNINGS AT WHATCOMBE, (by John Gunstone. Hodder & Stoughton. 1976. pp. 125 70p). QUESTIONING WORSHIP, by T.G.A. Baker. SCM 1977. pp.88 90p). PRAY EVERY DAY, (by Ronald Jasper, Peter Coughlan & David Jasper. Collins. 1976. pp.174 90p). MISTER GOD, THIS IS ANNA, (by Fynn. Collins (Fountain). 1977. pp. 190 60p). POUSTINIA, (by Catherine de Hueck Doherty. Collins (Fountain). 1977. pp. 216 75p). REACHING OUT, (by Henri J.M. Nouwen. Collins 1976. pp. 153 £2.95). A STAIRCASE FOR SILENCE, (by Alan Ecclestone. DLT. 1977 pp. 152 £2.00). BE NOT AFRAID, (by Jean Vanier. Gill & Macmillan. 1976. pp. 145 £1.75). FOLLOWERS OF JESUS, (by Jean Vanier. Gill & Macmillan. 1976. pp. 84 £1.80). BECOMING WHAT I AM, (by H.A. Williams CR. DLT. 1977 pp.77. £1.50). I AM WITH YOU, (by Celine Mangan O.P. Veritas. 1975. pp. 96. 95p). FULLY HUMAN, FULLY ALIVE, (by John Powell S.J. Argus 1976. pp.190 £1.00). THE RELAXATION RESPONSE, (by Herbert Benson with Miriam Z. Klipper. Collins (Fontana). 1976. pp. 158 70p). THE TM TECHNIQUE, (by Peter Russell. RKP. 1976. pp. 195 £3.75). THE PRACTICE OF MEDITATION, (by Klemens Tilmann. Search. 1977. pp.139 No price given). PRECARIOUS LIVING, (by Martin Israel. Hodder & Stoughton. 1976. pp. 190 £3.75). AN INTRODUCTION TO MYSTICISM, (by Margaret Smith. Sheldon. 1977. pp. 121 £1.75). THE WISDOM OF THE SPANISH MYSTICS, (by Stephen Clissold. Sheldon 1977. pp. 88 £1.50). THE WISDOM OF THE SUFIS, (by Kenneth Cragg. Sheldon. 1976. pp. 94. £1.50). THE ZEN WAY, (by Irmgard Schloegl. Sheldon. 1977. pp. 117 £2.95). I BELIEVE, (by Paul Guérin. Mayhew-McCrimmon. 1977. pp. 126 £1.65).