

fruits of the rich combination of masculine/feminine, contemplation/action, prayer/justice, monastic/apostolic. As we seek to combine the polarities we find in ourselves as well as in the world, we can say with Merton, "When I pray I am, in a certain sense, everybody" (*Thomas Merton in Alaska: The Alaskan Conferences*. New York: New Directions, 1989).

Annice Callahan, R.S.C.J.

SPIRITUAL GUIDES FOR TODAY:

**Evelyn Underhill, Dorothy Day, Karl Rahner,
Simone Weil, Thomas Merton, Henri Nouwen**

New York: Crossroad, 1992 - \$11.95

Reviewed by George A. Kilcourse

Amid an avalanche of new spirituality studies, Annice Callahan has assembled a detailed mosaic of three women and three men who personify the Catholic ethos. *Spiritual Guides for Today* builds upon the strength of her earlier work, *Karl Rahner's Spirituality of the Pierced Heart*, and the recent collection which she edited, *Spiritualities of the Heart*. The six diverse authors examined here reveal the mystery of God's love in their unique biographies. Callahan, a professor of spiritual theology at Regis College in Toronto, analyzes how the substantial writings of each invite readers to get in touch with their own hearts in order to, in turn, help others get in touch with theirs.

The lens for this study is Karl Rahner's spirituality of the heart. The German Jesuit identified the heart as the place where our freedom, consciousness, and affectivity ultimately dwell. In his vision of the spiritual life, the heart is the place to surrender to God; even in Jesus' heart is the center of freedom where he surrenders to the incomprehensible mystery of God. In the case of Dorothy Day, Rahner himself, and Simone Weil, Callahan explicitly explores five "attitudes of the heart" that qualify them as spiritual guides; she examines five aspects of spiritual life or particular insights that qualify Underhill, Merton, and Nouwen for this same role.

In this survey, Underhill's mysticism becomes a way of life (and not merely a type of knowledge) rendering "a practical mysticism of daily life." Day's role as peacemaker is grounded in contemplative prayer and a searing sense of social sin. Rahner fathoms the grace in moments of everyday life, even in God's seeming absence and the atheist's quandry before God's incomprehensibility. Again Rahner's centrality to the book's organization is evident with his insistence on both a mystical and a societal dimension in contemporary Christianity which unites love of God and love of neighbor. Simone Weil's "solidarity in affliction" during the Second World War witnesses to the evils of humiliating social degradation visited upon workers by industrialization and warfare. Her experience of Catholic culture deepens a redemptive suffering as the heart's response to those deprived of personality by modern afflictions. Callahan proposes that Thomas Merton's spirituality necessarily begins with a solitude that gives rise to both contemplation and compassion. Finally, in Henri Nouwen she finds insight into affective conversion grounded in this Dutch pastoral theologian's own growth and autobiographical writings.

The patterns of trust and transformation in all six of these "spiritual guides" invariably give rise to an incarnational spirituality which finds the privileged place of Christ in the lives of the poor. Callahan grounds the social witness in each author's "openness to human intimacy." The depth dimension of her mosaic is revealed by the luminous quality of a contemplation that energizes peacemaking and service to the wounded of the world. In this regard, each guide proves counter-cultural. Readers of *The Merton Annual* will discover here one of the best available theological essays to interpret Merton's spirituality from the vantage of a solitude that gave birth to both the contemplative experience and its implications for a deepening compassion for the world and all peoples. Callahan proves most cogent in searching the value of this solitude. She finds Merton's drama of the "true self" unfolding in the ongoing challenge of self-acceptance. She offers a concise and alert reading of the monk's own understanding of spiritual direction: "to get behind the persona that we present to the world and to evoke our inner freedom and truth, which is the likeness of Christ in us." This discernment becomes prayer as an awakening to self-revelation in Merton's spirituality. Her reading of Merton's writings through the lens of Rahner's spirituality of the heart provides a center of gravity to appreciate his own sometimes scattered reflections.

Such a collection whets the reader's appetite for further exploration. Annice Callahan provides bountiful resources in the form of succinct, annotated "readings" lists to conclude each chapter. Her detailed footnotes coax readers further for she includes critical interpretations and reference to contrary readings. Her chronological arrangement (by birth dates) loses focus because of the untimely early deaths of Weil and Merton. The essays are well-written but occasionally encyclopedic.

Critical wrestling with some paradoxes posed by these guides deserves more space. For example, Underhill's late pacifism gets a single paragraph. And Weil's "apparently inconsistent positions on war and peace" are remarked but not criticized. Day's forced choice between Catholicism and marriage captures the religious ethos, but Callahan only implies that alternatives today proved new spiritual solutions. When it comes to Merton's life, she begins by affirming that his "childhood years of loneliness had a formative effect with respect to the development of gifts." Her interpretation of his loneliness being transformed into solitude suggests a linear development which has been forcefully challenged by David Cooper, among others. One hopes to hear yet more from this important theologian in her reflections on the discontinuities in Merton's life and writings. The position of the Nouwen chapter proves especially climactic because his writing builds upon so many of the collection's preceding authors, not least upon Merton. Callahan provides a compelling study of Nouwen's sense of ministry and mission as "solidarity in powerlessness." He bases this understanding in the contemplative wisdom that "openness to others springs from an openness to ourselves."

Spiritual Guides for Today claims a unique place in the conversation of contemporary Catholic spirituality. It proves useful as a representative collection of persons who have contributed both intellectually and by witness to the pattern of contemplation and action. But most of all, Callahan has provided a Rahnerian hermeneutic for the future study of Catholic spirituality by confirming how these six modern guides personify various ways of living which enable us to mature in a Christ-consciousness that puts us in touch with unique attitudes of heart.