

American readers a glimpse of his day in the hermitage and the inner world of his heart. Like Merton, Kownacki invites us to observe the outer landscape of our world and nurture the inner landscape of our spirit as we enter into this amazing conversation "between two souls."

Christine M. Bochen

CHITTISTER, Joan, *Called to Question: A Spiritual Memoir*, (Sheed & Ward, 2004). pp. 260. ISBN # 1580511430. (Hardcover) \$21.95.

In *Called to Question: A Spiritual Memoir*, Sister Joan D. Chittister, a well-known spokesperson for social justice, calls for a spirituality which continually questions hierarchy, orthodoxies, and traditional religious assumptions, while celebrating the sacramentality and holiness of daily life. This little book consists of 25 brief chapters, each 6-8 pages in length, suitable for daily devotional reading. The chapters cover topics such as prayer, solitude, gender, justice, friendship, and the dark night of the soul.

The chapters are built around Sister Chittister's journal entries responding to quotations she found in a diary she used for a period of time (*In Good Company: A Woman's Journal for Spiritual Reflection*, published by Pilgrim Press, 1998). Every chapter in Chittister's book begins with a quotation she found in the journal, usually quotations of scripture or from women such as Teresa of Avila, Ann E. Carr, Thérèse of Lisieux, and Madeleine L'Engle. Each chapter's epigraphic quotation is followed by an excerpt from Chittister's own journal entry, responding to the quote. The chapter then expands on the theme begun in the journal, forming Chittister's conversation with the women quoted in the journal.

Called to Question is heavily autobiographical in style, as it opens with a discussion of Chittister's upbringing by parents in a "mixed marriage" and her questioning of fellow Roman Catholics who believed her Presbyterian stepfather would go to hell. Many chapters relate Chittister's wrestling with what she believes to be many Christians' rigid and hierarchical interpretation of their tradition. She describes her struggle to remain within the Roman Catholic Church, even as she finds resources within the tradition, especially monasticism, to be beneficial.

In many instances, her prose is insightful and profound, as she contrasts "real prayer" with escapist "self-induced hypnotism": "Real prayer plunges us into life, red and raw. It gives us new

eyes. It leaves us breathless in the presence of the living God. It makes demands on us—to feed the hungry and clothe the naked, give drink to the thirsty and take care of the sick. It requires that we become the hands of the God “we say we have found” (p. 47). Particularly insightful are Chittister’s reflections on commitment (chapter 10) and finding the sacred within “dailiness” (pp. 200-205). Chapter 11, on “balance,” is a very fine reflection on the nature of one’s vocation and calling.

Unfortunately the opening chapters of the book present a simplistically sharp dichotomy between “religion” (frequently characterized by institutions, rules, hierarchy, and oppressive judgmentalism), on the one hand, and “spirituality” (life-giving connection with the Divine), on the other hand. For instance, she says on page 16, “When religion makes itself God, when religion gets between the soul and God, when religion demands what the spirit deplores—a division of peoples, diminishment of the self, and closed-mindedness—religion becomes the problem. Then, spirituality is the only valid answer to the cry of the soul for the kind of life that makes life possible.” Or, on pp. 21-22, “Religion is, at best, external. Spirituality is the internal distillation of this externalized witness to the divine.” This overly sharp differentiation between spirituality and religion might appeal to the numerous folks who are inclined to say, “I’m spiritual but not religious”; however, Sister Chittister could have offered her readers a more nuanced use of these terms.

Chittister is most engaging when she shares the wisdom and spiritual lessons she learned as a young woman religious from older sisters who were her mentors. While strongly deplored society’s tendency to sentimentalize and romanticize nuns, she introduces her readers to elderly Sister Hildegund, a mystic who talked to God (sometimes singing to God, sometimes scolding God) while standing over metal washtubs of wet linen, making pleats in the nuns’ headgear. The author likewise celebrates Sister Marie Claire’s love of symphony and opera music, listening to records on Sunday afternoons. Marie Claire, she said, was “steadfastly opposed to the suppression of joy in the name of holiness” (p. 216). Chittister is moved “by the model of such bold and wanton delight in the face of such institutional negation of it” (p. 216).

I would commend *Called to Question* to readers looking for an account of a spirited engagement with the Christian tradition and

guidance for those seeking contemplative experience in the midst of everyday activity.

Joy A. Schroeder

KIRVAN, John, *Grace through Simplicity: The Practical Spirituality of Evelyn Underhill* (Notre Dame, IN: Ave Maria Press, 2004), pp. 7-206. ISBN 1594710260 (paperback). \$8.95.

This little book, one in the series “30-Days with a Great Spiritual Teacher,” elaborates and explores in prayerful form the insights of an extraordinary lay spiritual teacher, scholar of mysticism, guide to the contemplative life, and pioneer in the retreat movement. Evelyn Underhill (1875-1941) was a prolific author and editor, who both reclaimed the treasures of the mystical tradition and translated their wisdom, making them accessible to what she called “normal” people. Her most influential book, *Mysticism: A Study of the Nature and Development of Man’s Spiritual Consciousness*, was published in 1911 and has remained in print continuously. In 1921 at mid-point in her writing career she moved from the life of scholarship to one in which she interpreted the mystical tradition for clergy and laity through popular writing, lecturing, and the giving of retreats. At the end of her life she became a pacifist, applying literally the mandate of the love of God that she discovered first in the mystics. Her corpus was very large, focusing not only on the mystical tradition but also on holiness, prayer, worship and the spiritual life. It established her as one of the early twentieth century foremothers of the contemporary burgeoning interest in spirituality. Among others, she influenced T.S. Eliot and the young Columbia University student, Thomas Merton.

Kirvan, who conceived of the 30-Days series and has authored most of its titles, wrote *God Hunger*, *Silent Hope*, *Raw Faith*, and *There is a God, There is No God*. The purpose of *Grace Through Simplicity* is to make the spiritual experience and wisdom of Underhill accessible and to invite the reader to meditate and pray her words daily for a month. Each meditation is structured in the same tripartite way: “My Day Begins,” “All Through the Day” and “My Day is Ending.”

“My Day Begins” includes some ten to fifteen lines from Underhill. “All Through the Day” recapitulates one line from that selection, and “My Day is Ending” is Kirvan’s prayer emerging from meditation on her words. As envisioned by Kirvan, the book