

Religious Life at the Crossroads: A School for Mystics and Prophets. By Amy Hereford, C.S.J. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2013. Pp. xxiv + 206. \$20.

Religious life is dying; religious life is being born anew. These two dynamics are working simultaneously among women religious today. Hereford views this two-part reality as God's dream for religious life. In 2012 there were about 57,000 women religious in the United States, but only 3,000 (5%) were under the age of 55 (xii). The dominant cohort—those 60 to 100 years of age—have made a tremendous contribution to the church, especially to its institutions in education and hospital care, and they have been at the forefront in a faithful renewal called for by Vatican II. The challenge now is to care for these remarkable women and to celebrate their lifelong dedication. The younger cohort carries whatever future God is calling for in religious life, and they are the focus of H.'s treatise.

H. begins with a cursory history of religious life tracking the rise and fall of religious orders and congregations through the centuries, with every 400 to 500 years marking a major upheaval. We are again at such a time.

To discern the possibility of fresh initiatives, H. creatively draws on models of radical Christian community established by Dietrich Bonhoeffer (New Monasticism), Roger Schutz (Taizé), Dorothy Day (the Catholic Worker), and Jean Vanier (L'Arche). Their common threads include spirituality, community, and mission.

After a chapter creatively reimagining the future for religious life, H. concludes with a helpful chapter on mystics and prophets as two key charisms at the heart of religious life.

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The Book of Common Prayer: A Biography. By Alan Jacobs. Lives of Great Religious Books. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University, 2013. Pp. xiii + 236. \$24.95.

The subtitle of this book—*A Biography*—gives readers an initial indication that this is not a typical study of a liturgical document. During the 450 years since the first Book of Common Prayer (BCP) was authorized in 1549, the sheer quantity of literature that it has generated is astounding. Even if we put aside the various editions that have emerged in the 30-plus provinces of the Anglican Communion, the scope of that literature has included not only commentaries but also a wide range of apologetical writings that analyze the texts and rubrics of these editions in minute detail, often from very different points of view.

By adding the subtitle, Jacobs has indicated a kind of personalization in his approach to the subject. The book does not present readers merely with data about the origins and development of the BCP, but rather places its entire story within a human framework among the people—monarchs and prelates, ordinary people, and their parish priests—whose lives shaped the context in which the prayer book developed.

J. has woven together an extraordinary array of historical details, a tapestry of both well-known facts and auxiliary insights that illuminate the human circumstances out of which a particular version of the BCP emerged. The historical material, though abundant, never overwhelms the book's narrative flow. J. has focused the text generally by placing complementary historical data in valuable notes that no reader should overlook. This book is an important contribution to prayer-book literature.

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The Complete Introduction to The Devout Life. By Francis de Sales. Translated from the French by John Julian, O.J.N. Paraclete Giants. Brewster, MA: Paraclete, 2013. Pp. xxix + 389. \$26.99.

This book, an undeniable classic of Christian spirituality, often ranked as the third most popular spiritual book of all time behind only the Bible and *The Imitation of Christ*. Its chapters are brief and offer practical spiritual advice on prayer, virtue, temptation, and perseverance in holiness. While some parts do not translate well into the 21st century, most of this 400-year-old text retains its relevance and provides a window into the spirituality of a bishop who was able to relate closely to the challenges and aspirations of his flock.

With 16 other editions drawn from five different English translations currently available, one might question whether a new edition of the *Introduction* offers anything that we do not already have. In addition to the text, the Paraclete Press version contains a useful introduction that placed Francis de Sales and his work in historical context; a chronology of de S.'s life with helpful references to noteworthy people and events of the times; a six-page bibliography; and extensive commentary typeset so that the notes fall on the left page and de S.'s text on the right.

The clear strength of this volume lies in its notes and commentary. In addition to numerous scriptural citations, the *Introduction* is replete with references to Pliny's *Naturalis historia* and the spiritual writings of the saints, including several not well known today. The translator has provided a tremendous service to those with either a scholarly or devotional interest in Salesian spirituality by providing over a thousand textual notations that elucidate both meaning and context. As for the translation itself, the stated commitment "to avoid modernizing or remodeling de S.'s often elegant language" (xxviii) sometimes results in a wordy or formalized English rendering that fails to stir the heart or appeal to the reader's aesthetic sensibilities. De S. excelled in those areas, and other English translations more gracefully evoke that Salesian quality. Nevertheless the notes in themselves make an invaluable contribution, leaving this reader hoping that a similar treatment of de S.'s *Treatise on the Love of God* will be forthcoming.

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