

The Vows Book: Anglican Teaching on the Vows of Obedience, Poverty, and Chastity. By Clark Berge. Mt. Sinai, NY: Vest Pocket Publications, 2014. Pp. 141. \$15.95.

This practical book, written in the thin-column style of Peter Maurin's *Easy Essays*, shows how the vows of obedience, poverty, and chastity can shape lay and religious life. The six brief chapters detail the nature and purpose of the vows, describe various prayer practices, and contend that vowed life is best expressed in loving service of God and neighbor.

In Berge's view, obedience involves listening and responding to the Holy Spirit, who speaks through Scripture, tradition, others, conscience, and the natural world. Poverty is the voluntary choice to follow the example of Jesus, which frees one to serve others (especially the poor) with joy. Chastity helps married and celibate people live distinctively, love rightly, and further the kingdom of God. The vows take root and transform one through prayer and acts of service.

The book has three main strengths. First, it appeals to personal stories and the lives of exemplars to show how the vows form character, foster spirituality, and encourage social action. The result is a concrete account of the vowed life. Second, each chapter includes a number of exercises—topics to pray about and discuss—which would be useful in an examination of conscience. This, then, is a guide to spiritual formation that should be practiced. Third, the straightforward writing style helps make B.'s views easy to understand and apply to one's life. At times, however, this style leads to amusing expressions. For example, the chapter on chastity has a section entitled "What about sexy thoughts and feelings?" If one lets the direct language disarm rather than distract, this is an effective book to promote reflection on one's calling.

B.'s Anglican spirituality is influenced by Franciscan ideas and practices, making it relevant to a wide audience—among others: spiritual directors, those discerning a call to ordained ministry or religious life, students in a course on spirituality, and parishioners interested in deepening their spiritual practices.

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Humble Confidence: Spiritual and Pastoral Guidance from Karl Rahner. By James J. Bacik. Collegetown, MN: Liturgical. Pp. xi + 185. \$19.95.

After more than 50 years of reading Karl Rahner, I would not hesitate to call Bacik's book "the complete Rahner," as it covers every major and minor aspect of Rahner's monumental achievement—except his thesis that the economic Trinity is the immanent Trinity, and vice versa. It is a must-read for those seeking a lucid, nuanced, jargon-free, synthetic overview of Rahner's philosophical, theological, and spiritual writings.

The book's structure illustrates B.'s long fascination with Rahner's method of correlation, a method as significant as, for example, Origen's baptism of Greek philosophy, Augustine's infusion of Western theology with Latin categories and Roman habits

of mind, and Thomas Aquinas's appropriation of Aristotle. Rahner's method focused, in part, on the anthropocentric foundation of the truths of the Christian faith. Rahner understood the realities of the faith as the keys that unlock the multiple mysteries of what it means to be a human being: theology is anthropology, and anthropology is theology. Rahner's critical reverence for the Christian tradition, coupled with his keen sense of the needs of the contemporary world, produced a holistic approach to Christianity that makes its truths more intelligible and credible. B.'s book makes this holistic approach plain.

A 1960s article in *The National Catholic Reporter* dismissed Rahner's theology as woefully abstract, spiritually and pastorally sterile, and irrelevant for Christian living. B., agreeing with Rahner, seeks to correct this view. He asserts that the more scientific theology is, the more spiritually and pastorally relevant it will be; he also points out that many of Rahner's works are sermons, homilies, contemplations, prayers, and timely spiritual and pastoral pieces, written for specific audiences in particular moments. Chapter 5 contains reflections on how profoundly Rahner influenced B.'s own priestly spiritual and pastoral life—B.'s meditations on Mother Teresa and John Updike should not be missed.

Although somewhat less than trenchant, the epilogue, "Defending Rahner against His Critics," adequately shows that Rahner not only easily refuted his detractors but also assimilated and creatively deepened their valid insights. The epilogue also underscores Rahner's enduring influence in the theological world. As I have often said, "Karl Rahner always buries his undertakers."

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Ethics and Spirituality. Edited by Charles E. Curran and Lisa A. Fullam. Readings in Moral Theology 17. Mahwah, NJ: Paulist, 2014. Pp. xii + 275. \$29.95.

We live in an age when increasing numbers of people, especially in the younger generations, refer to themselves as "spiritual but not religious." Beyond that phrase often lies a desire to distance oneself from an institution that is experienced as restricting and out-of-touch; it also bespeaks a yearning for spiritual nourishment, often without much accountability for ethical behavior. In many of its selections, this collection of writings makes the case that a robust spirituality has implications for relationships with others and the world.

In this installment of the well-known Readings in Moral Theology series, the editors have divided this collection of 15 essays into three parts of equal size. Part I, featuring selections from Mark O'Keefe, Norbert Rigali, Richard Gula, William Spohn, and Curran himself, focuses on foundational issues such as the nature of ethics and spirituality as distinct academic disciplines, their historical divergence, and the ways they might be fruitfully reconnected today. As a teacher, I wish they had included a sample from one of the old manuals of moral theology, since examining that style of