



The Book Reviewer

ST. MARY'S PARISH LIBRARY AUGUST 2012

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The Great Themes of Scripture by Richard Rohr and Joseph Martos (Scripture)

Many of us, perhaps most, have at some time or other been conflicted when reading scripture, especially when reading about the life and words of Jesus in the New Testament. This book, written in a simple and lucid style by Joseph Martos, and taken from lectures by Richard Rohr, explains easily and gracefully the meaning and context of each of the books, from Matthew through Revelation. Context is of primary importance because the first Christian communities, two thousand years ago, had a very different mind-set from our own. Traditionally used to ideas being presented in myth and parable, they were not nearly as literal-minded as we are.

The Jewish communities which comprised the first “church” were not expecting their stories and beliefs to be either scientifically or historically accurate. They understood the preaching and the stories at a deeper level, and they knew that myths are not lies—they simply point to deep spiritual and psychological truths. They were also more comfortable living in deep time—past, present, and future. Deep time is God’s time—everything is present.

Even so, things haven’t changed all that much; the same moral blindness which led to the crucifixion of Jesus bedevils us.

“Helping the poor can be a threat to the rich. Telling people to love their enemies can

be a threat to national security. Giving food to the poor can be seen as a threat to the economy.”

And as we see at present, affordable health care is perceived as a threat to religious freedom, and to our pocket books. Especially important is Fr. Rohr’s understanding of how both the temple service and the code of morality of Jesus’s time, and the rituals and teachings of our own churches can keep people locked in spiritual immaturity.

“If they do not invite people to a personal dialogue with a living God, they become an end in themselves... The opposite of a real faith is not atheism. It is religiosity.”

Reviewed by Clare Dinno

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Life is Beautiful

The Golden String by Bede Griffiths (Spirituality)

The Golden String is an apt metaphor for this spiritual autobiography; in William Blake's poem, and in ancient myth:

"only wind it into a ball, it will lead you to heaven's gate."

In the course of his long life, Bede Griffiths faithfully follows wherever he is led by the Holy Spirit. Raised in a middle class family, he managed to receive an excellent education, first in a "charity" school, where parents paid only on the basis of family income, and later with scholarships to Oxford.

His wide-ranging reading led him first away from religion and from his Church of England roots; and then through a love of nature and romantic poetry he gradually found his way back. His reading in litera-

ture and philosophy, through Homer to Dante, Plato and Aristotle, led him finally to St. Thomas Aquinas and John Henry Newman, and to the Catholic Church.

Dissatisfaction with the Industrial Revolution led him, with two of his Oxford friends, to experiment with living an extremely simple life in a Cotswold cottage. They ate local dairy products, baked their own bread, and grew their own vegetables. It was an experiment which led, after continuing intellectual growth, to a Benedictine monastery. After this preparation, he was perfectly suited to the monastic life. Being told that he was entering the "contemplative life", he was initially surprised at how very busy that life was:

divided always by the liturgical "hours", beginning at four in the morning, and on through a day of study, manual labor, mealtimes with lectio divina, short periods of recreation, and one even shorter period—one half hour—of private prayer.

"It was some time before I learned the true nature of contemplation. Contemplation is a habit of mind which enables the soul to keep in a state of recollection in the presence of God, whatever may be the work with which we are occupied. In this sense it is the goal and aim of every Christian life."

The last 35 years of his life he spent in India, where he established an ashram, a small monastic community for people of different faiths.

Reviewed by Clare Dinno

The Creative Spirit by June Boyce-Tillman (People of the Church)

Many books have been written about the remarkable Hildegard of Bingen, the 12th century Benedictine nun who left a legacy of poetry, music, and spiritual insights about our loving creator, our humanity, and our natural world. Boyce-Tillman, a composer and founder of a worldwide organization devoted to harmonizing theology,

the arts, and healing, offers us a compressed, sometimes meandering account of Hildegard's life and work. In explaining her theology—which developed from her sense of original goodness, leading to faith based on trust, not guilt—the author draws on the holy woman's own words, introducing each chapter with one of Hildegard's

antiphons, then detailing a related aspect of faith—Prayer, Justice, Wisdom and the Virgin Mary—enhanced by her writings, visions, and music.

Included are reflections which use imagery to move the reader toward healing through an awareness of harmony and wholeness, the matrix of Hildegard's entire life's work.

Reviewed by Susan Triplett