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Fullness of Life: Historical Foundations for a New Mysticism by Margaret R. Miles

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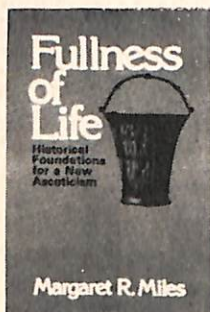
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relationship of theology and culture. At a time like ours when theology is in flux there is both instruction and consolation in a close look at past eras of cultural achievement where we can study theological shifts of interest and mutating religious paradigms with something akin to detachment.

Duby is one of the French *Annales* historians and like his colleague Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie writes wonderfully. He has passion and clarity. This work, translated by Eleanor Levieux and Barbara Thompson, reads well in English but could have used a reading from a professional medievalist who would have caught some lingering gallicanisms: *Peter LeMangeur* for Peter Comestor; Venerable Peter for Peter the Venerable; Saint Claire for Clare; *Valdo* for Waldo; *Damiette* for Damietta; and constant references to Benedictine *friars* (an obvious mistranslation of *freres*) for the more correct brothers or brethren. These small errors and a tendency at times to overgeneralize (a problem endemic in histories of this sort) detract little from the overall excellence of this work. It is highly recommended. •

LAWRENCE CUNNINGHAM



FULLNESS OF LIFE: HISTORICAL FOUNDATIONS FOR A NEW ASCETICISM,
by Margaret R. Miles,
Philadelphia: Westminster Press,
1981, 186 pp.

When in his poem "Among School Children" W.B. Yeats spoke of that place where "the body is not bruised to pleasure soul," he unwittingly pointed to a task that has lately engaged the energies of a number of scholars of Christianity: how to revalorize the body in the Christian tradition and rescue it from its status as the spiritually

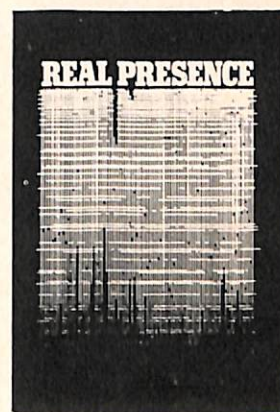
detrimental half of human being. Margaret Miles, a professor of historical theology at Harvard Divinity School, has responded to this task with scholarship, style and insight. The stated purpose of this lucid study of authors from Ignatius of Antioch to Thomas Aquinas is "to reclaim . . . historic Christian ideas of the meaning and value of body, and to show how these are related to the goals of traditional asceticism." But it is something more. Miles completes her historical study with valuable suggestions regarding a contemporary Christian ascetical spirituality that can help us combat the disintegrative forces of modern life.

Miles' chapter "Human Nature and Embodiment in Augustine" is particularly noteworthy. No one who has read its sixteen short pages will ever again be able to casually toss the blame for Christian negativism toward the body on the shoulders of the Bishop of Hippo. Miles shows us that what is true for many early Christian authors is eminently true for Augustine: the body is spoken of in a number of different contexts and distinguishing them is crucial to a correct understanding of the author's position. Sometimes the body is used as a *foil* for the soul, a rhetorical device for playing up the greater beauty of the soul. Sometimes the body is spoken of as a *problem* to be overcome by the soul. But often, and most importantly, the body is presented as the very *condition* of human learning, trial, salvation and resurrection to eternal life. Though the tension between affirmation and negation of the body in Augustine will never disappear, Miles underscores the fact that the incarnation of Christ remains for him the paradigm of the meaning and value of embodiment.

Augustine's psychological acuity also receives deft treatment from the author. Her conclusion is adamant: "The problem is not — emphatically not — either the bodily senses themselves or physical pleasures. It is the condition of being addicted — enslaved, to use Augustine's word — to these pleasures." Miles suggests that we have repeatedly misinterpreted the role of the body in Christian life because we have forgotten the true meaning of the Pauline distinction between spirit and flesh. We have mistakenly taken them to be synonyms of soul and body when, in fact, they are names of tendencies which inform and shape *both* body and soul. "Spirit" is an orientation toward union with the source of life and being; "flesh" a disorientation away from this source, the desperate and unconscious demand for immediate satisfactions that can overpower both body and soul and leave them unfree and uncentered. The flesh's domination robs soul and body of their true vitality. It is the flesh so understood, not the body, that an ascetical spirituality is meant to combat.

Miles' discovery that historic Christian authors are, on balance, overwhelmingly affirming of the body is tempered by the admission that traditional ascetical practice with its exaggeratedly dualistic assumptions can no longer serve us. Yet, she asserts, we are as much in need of methods to concentrate our energies as were any of our Christian predecessors. To this end she outlines a new asceticism in her closing chapter. The kind of doctrinal insight that Miles' study affords, she reminds us, is but a preparation for the necessary task of "doing differently," introducing into our routines new practices which can clear out the clutter of habits and addictions that erode our inherent vitality and which can reconcentrate the energies so easily scattered by the pace of modern life. *Fullness of Life* is an intelligent and careful work, one that both scholars and educated laypersons will find valuable. I can warmly recommend it to anyone interested in Christian spirituality. •

PHILIP NOVAK



REAL PRESENCE. Worship, Sacraments, and Commitment.
by Regis Duffy,
New York: Harper & Row, 1982
206 pp. \$8.95

This book deals with a perennial and basic problem in a fresh and penetrating way: Why is there so much corporate worship among Christians and, apparently, so little real commitment? "When do both liturgy and theology collude and offer rituals and reasons not to commit oneself, communally and individually, to Gospel demands, but to escape them?"

The author, a Franciscan scholar who teaches sacramental and pastoral theology