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Review: The Helper

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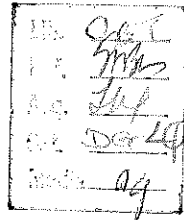
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Catherine Marshall

The Helper

Chosen Books Publishing Co., \$6.95

Robert Nash

Bringing Christ Back

Our Sunday Visitor, Inc., \$3.95 paper.

Reviewed by Elmer L. Towns

Catherine Marshall, author of other well-known books such as *A Man Called Peter* and *Christy*, has turned her attention to applied theology in her latest book, entitled *The Helper*. Here she writes a series of daily devotionals for self-help or group discussion on the Holy Spirit. She notes, "Most of us begin by thinking of the Holy Spirit as an influence, something ghostly, floating, ethereal, that produces a warm and loving feeling in us." Then she makes the point, "But the Helper is no influence. He is rather a person . . . a friend we can come to know and love."

This book has several strong points. It is well-written, putting obscure biblical language into modern terminology; it attempts to solve contemporary problems; it is up-to-date. Catherine Marshall's desire to communicate spiritually comes through the pages in a warm sense. The book is not a treatise of systematic theology, and a church dogmatist would probably call the author a mystic. She is more emotional than rational in interpreting the scripture. She proposes a walk with Christ based on feelings and desire. This could also be called a weakness. Her lack of theological training raises questions about the way she interprets some of the scripture texts. As an illustration, she makes Jesus the baptizer with the Holy Ghost, using such verses as John 15:26 and 20:21, 22. Marshall tackles the controversial problem of speaking in tongues. Although she never advocates the doctrine of tongues in an explicit manner, she implies it by appreciation for the new charismatic movement. Also, she applies it by the use of illustrations of others who spoke in tongues, with the implication that everyone should follow that example.

At this point, her research could be questioned. The author praises the charismatic movement and implies that John Wesley, R. A. Torrey, and others were involved in speaking in tongues.

This is questionable. She also leaves us with the impression that the success of her former husband, Dr. Peter Marshall, was because of this phenomenon.

The author is correct when she says, "We have no greater need today than to be informed about the Helper. We need to know who He is, why we need Him, what miraculous acts of love He longs to perform for us and how we go about receiving Him." These are great questions that she begins to answer.

Author Robert Nash, S. J., has written a moving drama of the events that led up to Calvary and the final passion of Jesus Christ. His intent is to motivate the average Christian to appreciate the extent of Christ's suffering and to cause Calvary. Hence, the title *Bringing Christ Back* is a personification of the author's desire to get Christ back into the daily lives of Christians.

The book is divided into three equal sections. First, the author discusses each of the personalities who were involved in the death of Christ. They are Mary,

"A Symbol of Something Important Happening in American Life." —THE NEW YORK TIMES



"The North American Congress of the Laity may well have been the most significant religious convocation in this country in this decade. This book is at once an integrated report, an interpretation of the world in which we live, and a challenge to the laity to assume its appropriate leadership in the church and in society."
—James I. McCord,
Princeton Theological Seminary
A Crossroad Book, hardbound edition, \$8.95; paperback \$3.95

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the mother of Jesus, who is given a prominent position; the Apostle John; Mary Magdalene; Simon Peter; Judas; Caiaphas; Pilate; and Herod. Second, the traditional stations of the cross as recognized by Roman Catholics are discussed. Nash calls this "a drama," and he attempts to develop the plot accordingly. However, he is more academic than dramatic. A distinct Christian virtue is accentuated at every station with application to the life of the reader.

Bringing Christ Back is devotional literature and the author has done a masterful job of weaving together scripture, tradition, quotations from great church fathers, and modern journalistic expressions. However, there are some weaknesses in the manuscript. Nash confuses Mary the sister of Martha and Mary Magdalene in the minds of the readers, at least, by discussing them together. Also, most scholars would think he is easy on Judas, painting him as a person caught in circumstances, rather than the eternal traitor of the Son of God.

Another problem with the text is its structure. It appears as though there were three different books within one cover. The three sections discuss the same subject (Calvary) but there is no flow of ideas, nor is there a logical building of arguments throughout the book.

Laymen will enjoy reading this book as it is intended to be an exercise of the emotions. The introduction to the book tells us that when it signals "Plunging us right into the maelstrom of events during the central moments of all history."

Elmer L. Towns is editor of Faith Affaire.

George A. Sheehan

Running and Being

The Total Experience

Simon and Schuster, \$8.95

Reviewed by Timothy D. Mead

George Sheehan, author of *Running and Being*, denies it is a book. Rather, he says, it is a journal. The distinction is important; Sheehan claims a book suggests finality, not growth. Further, it explains Sheehan's remarkable inconsistencies.

Recent converts to running exude a kind of religious enthusiasm. For them Sheehan is a guru. *Running and Being* is a collection of Sheehan's columns, and all of the religion-like themes are included.

"Religion," says Sheehan, "is not something you belong to, or accept, or think. It is something you do. . . . Religion is the way you manifest whatever is urgent and imperative in your relationship to yourself and your universe, and all of the religion-like themes are included."

Sheehan defines himself running. "I run, therefore I am." Once you know Sheehan runs, you can understand his cosmology.

But it is not quite so simple. Sheehan is a mystic. Much of the lure and lore of distance running is mystical, what Sheehan calls the "unity of body and mind." This occurs after the "third wind," which is not physical but psychological. Mind and body fuse into one self. Once running became mystical, Sheehan saw it as "proof of the existence of God." Mystics, of course, are immune from criticism and analysis—and Sheehan grants this.

Another major theme is virtue in suffering, particularly the travail of marathon runners. Character is seen as "the ability to persist in the direction of the greatest resistance," and sin is the failure to reach potential. Here, and elsewhere in Sheehan's journal, there is a hint of original sin.

If you want to find out about running, Sheehan's book is a poor beginning, and he knows it. But if you seek a lively account of one man's thoughts about himself and his place in the universe, *Running and Being* is well worth the effort.

Timothy D. Mead is a long distance runner, sometime marathoner, and fellow in public administration with The Academy for Contemporary Problems in Washington, D.C.

Back to Basics

Continued from page 5

come to understand them not by objective study but by the natural way of hearing the faithful speak and act, and coming to speak and act that way ourselves. Within the context of the faithful community, the language of faith makes sense; unintelligibility is a problem only for those who lie outside the faith or who have been confused by scholarly learnedness, theological disagreements, and rational skepticism.

With this understanding, it is not surprising that Professor Holmer believes that faith has no need of philosophical concepts or systems. Theism is seen as religiously insignificant, as gratuitous to the theological task. Philosophy's attempt to understand itself as providing a foundation for faith is dismissed on the grounds that the language of faith provides its own foundation and that the foundation of philosophy itself is in question today. Further, Holmer argues that modern philosophy is highly technical and itself needs to be helped to its own understanding. Thus the Tillichians, the Teilhardians and the Rahnerians, and those theologians who take their insights from Whitehead, Heidegger or Jaspers are thrown into the dustbins of theological wrong-headedness and religious irrelevance.

What is to be said about all this? First, we have to ask whether it is indeed the case that the traditional "grammar of faith," the ordinary language and practices of the believer, does indeed remain unproblematic to the believer whose consciousness has been conditioned by

knowledge of modern science, historical criticism, depth psychology, sociological analysis, etc. Is it really the case that there is no relation between the language, concepts, and presuppositions of faith and the language, concepts, and presuppositions of science? Is it, for example, the case that our understanding of how God acts now or acted at the time of the "exodus" is unaffected by our knowledge of natural science and of modern historical methodologies? Is it the case that our criteria for the intelligibility of religious language are the same as that of the second century believer, the tenth century believer, the sixteenth century believer?

Secondly, we must ask whether Professor Holmer adequately states the philosophical-theological relation? Is it really the case that philosophy, at best, is only a gratuitous addition to theology or, at worst, becomes a substitute for it? Is it not, at least, arguable that not only cultural presuppositions but metaphysical ones are woven into biblical language and the structure of biblical faith. Certainly, the fourth gospel's use of the logos concept as a Christological symbol is unintelligible apart from its metaphysical background. Similarly, Paul's concept of conscience and his use of the term body to indicate a commonwealth of members is dependent upon a Greek philosophical conceptuality.

I am not, of course, suggesting that biblical faith presupposes a particular metaphysical system; the Bible is unsystematic and many stranded in its concepts and images of God, Christ, human nature, history, etc.. I am suggesting that even within the narrative form of the Bible, the philosophical impulse can be detected, that there is no avoiding an implicit metaphysic in any faith understanding of the God-world relation and that faith's attempt to find its coherence with a systematic and critical interpretation of existence protects the mystery of faith from degenerating into false doctrine and superstition. Further, theological thinking, like all forms of thinking, is historical thinking, and this means that the theologian always thinks through and in tension with the language, concepts, and philosophical presuppositions of his or her own age. Our task, then, is not so much to sound Tertullian's warning that Athens has nothing to do with Jerusalem, as it is to self-consciously seek the philosophy which provides conceptual underpinning appropriate to Christian faith.