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*Taught by God: Teaching and Spiritual Formation* by Karen-Marie Yust and E. Byron Anderson, Chalice Press, St. Louis, 2006. Pp. 186. \$21.99. ISBN 0827236492.

Religious educators need a vibrant spiritual life. This seems obvious but it is easy to overlook. When we think about education, we immediately think about our own schooling where we were required to regurgitate information. We do not think about deeper dimensions of formation and what this demands of the teacher. But “can we teach Christians to pray,” authors Karen-Marie Yust and E. Byron Anderson stress again and again, “if we ourselves do not know a life of prayer?” (p. 19).

*Taught by God* is designed to address this oversight. It retrieves a rich variety of paths to Christian wisdom. In fact, a more accurate subtitle is “Spiritual Resources for Religious Educators.” Organized around a four-part exploration of teacher identity, teaching context, models, and evaluation, the book essentially reviews a series of classical texts (Luther, Kierkegaard, Julian of Norwich, John Cassian, Jane de Chantal, Francis de Sales, Anthony, John Bunyan, John Climacus, Thomas à Kempis, Benedict, Catherine of Siena, Diadochos, Ignatius, Henri Nouwen, and Simon Weil) as well as contemporary educational theorists, such as Parker Palmer and Mary Belenky.

The summaries of primary texts and secondary source commentary on them makes for dry reading, a problem “easily rectified,” Yust and Anderson say, “through further reading” of the classics (p. 5). Reading this book alongside sample works would enhance its value. Unfortunately the advice of many of these figures stands at real odds with the lives of the book’s likely readers. Without the deep stillness, solitude, and ascetic detachment cultivated by monastic life, we are told, “one cannot advance to

spiritual knowledge” (p. 60). Fortunately, a few, such as de Sales and de Chantal, offer wisdom for those with essential attachments and considerably less time to ourselves who cannot “go anywhere” else but must instead embrace what “comes our way” in daily life (p. 63-64).

Of essence, in whatever circumstance, is that the teacher be “taught by God.” Practice-oriented spirituality, anchored in communal and daily practice and undisturbed by secularization or faddish spirituality, is demonstrated through what we do and how we live rather than what we say or profess. In the school of Christ, we are called to “learn Christ” rather than “learn about Christ” (p. 97). Contrary to our usual intellectual and educational predilections, prayer time should outweigh study time. Progress is not forward or developmental but involves a turning back or “way of return” to proclamation of what God has done.

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