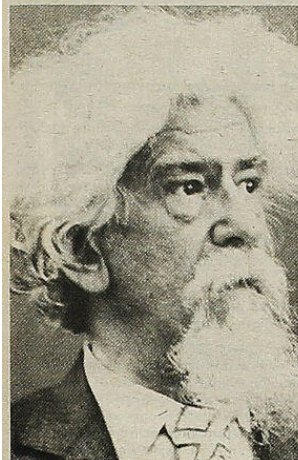


forum

# Heschel unites piety, praxis: God is either everywhere or nowhere

**Quest for God**  
By Abraham Joshua Heschel  
Crossroads, 151 pages, \$5.95  
Reviewed by JACK RIEMER

IT IS 10 YEARS now since the passing of Abraham Joshua Heschel, but his memory continues to be a blessing, and his influence increases with the passing of the years. Therefore this new edition of his book on



HESCHEL

prayer will be warmly welcomed by Jews and Christians.

Heschel combined two qualities rarely found together. He had a deep piety and concern for the inner life, and at the same time he had an equally deep commitment to social action and to making this a better world. This combination has a special mean-

*— Rabbi Jack Riemer of Congregation Beth El in La Jolla, Calif., is the co-editor of Ethical Willis: A Modern Jewish Treasury, which has just been published by Schocken Books.*

ing for us, for we live in an age when those who are pious tend to withdraw from the world, and those who are involved in the world seem to have little concern for the spiritual life.

It is hard to believe that the first essay in this book was written soon after Heschel first learned English, for it is a work of art. But it is important for its content too. It is a profound statement of the meaning of prayer, which Heschel understood, not as self-expression, as we usually think of it, but as *self-transcendence*, as opening oneself up to the divine. There are many who have written about the history of prayer or the sociology

of prayer but I know of no one who has written better about the essence of prayer than Heschel has here.

The background to the third and fourth chapters of this book sheds some light on the kind of human being Heschel was. By coincidence he was invited to speak one year to both the conservative and reform rabbinical groups, just a week apart. He prepared two talks, which later became the basis of these two chapters. To the conservative rabbis, who are committed to law and observance, he spoke about how law and observance by themselves are not enough — they must be combined with spirit and love or else they are meaningless. To the reform rabbis, who stress the spirit instead of the letter of the law, he said the very opposite — that spirit without letter is a ghost, that love without law cannot last.

He came to the podium, on both occasions, carrying both talks in his hand. If he had chosen to reverse them, he would have been praised in both places. Instead, he looked at them both for a moment, with an impish twinkle in his eyes, and then proceeded to give the talk that each group needed to hear.

He was hooted and jeered in both places, but he had done his duty, told the truth that needed to be told.

The last chapter is an important document in modern spiritual history. It was originally given as a speech in Germany, in March of 1938, under the shadow of the Nazis. It is a scorching indictment of Nazism, but it is also a denunciation of the arrogance of scientism and secularism, which brought about the climate of contempt for all things sacred that made Nazism possible. Its last words still ring with truth:

God will return to us when we are willing to let him in — into our banks and factories, our congresses and clubs, our courts and investigating committees, our homes and theatres. For God is either everywhere or nowhere, the Father of all men or of no men, concerned about everything or nothing. The mountain of history is over our heads again. Shall we renew our covenant with God?

Heschel's question still haunts and confronts us all.

## The how and why of monasticism

### The Monastic Impulse

By Walter Capps  
Crossroad, 163 pages, \$10.95

**A Place Apart: Monastic Prayer and Practice for Everyone**  
By M. Basil Pennington, OCSO  
Doubleday, 165 pages, \$12.95

Reviewed by RICHARD W. KROPP

IF PENNINGTON'S book is about "how to do it," Capps's book addresses the question, "why do it?" While both books are concerned with contemporary monasticism, the two approaches very much reflect the different starting points of their authors.

Walter Capps, a professor in the religious studies department of the University of California at Santa Barbara, and currently president of the American Academy of Religion, brings us a scholar's interest and an outsider's fascination with what he deems a persistent and growing attraction to the monastic life-style. But his approach is not academic. Instead, he visits various monasteries in the United States and Europe, places like Gethsemani, Ky., Taize, France, Our Lady of the Redwoods and Citeaux, and ponders the

*— Father Richard Kropp is a theologian who lives in solitude in the woods of northern Michigan.*

meaning of various aspects of this life in conversations with himself and others — focusing most of all on the recurrent vitality of the life.

He attributes this phenomenon to the cultural upheaval in Western society, the monk being the perennial harbinger of counter-cultural shift. Capps analyzes the impact of Thomas Merton from this point of view. He critically examines the supposed relationship between contemplative life and psychological narcissism. He rejects the presumed connection. Monasticism is instead a radical self-transcendence. And as such it is a source of change in a world where programs for renewal too often fail.

Father Basil Pennington, a Trappist monk of St. Joseph's Abbey, Spencer, Mass., takes all or most of Capps's questions — and answers — for granted. Pennington's book is a manual on how to get on with it. Consisting of 14 chapters, the book is actually a reworking of a series of talks that Pennington has given a number of times to small groups of men who have stayed at Spencer to consider joining the community.

The talks cover a multitude of topics ranging from apertness to peacemaking, but most impressive are the down-to-earth treatments on "watching" (night vigils) and fasting. These practices, in Pennington's mind, separate those who are really serious about adopt-

ing the monastic life-style from the dilettantes who are merely content to adapt some of its aura to the aesthetic expression of their personal piety.

All this, however, raises a question, in fact puts into question form the subtitle of Pennington's book — are monastic prayer and practice in fact for everyone? Capps, while defending the contemporary as well as eternal validity of monastic life, never seems to take for granted that it is for the average Christian: it remains special, *avant garde*, even counter-culture. Pennington, on the other hand, while seeing membership in the monastic community as a special vocation, nevertheless sees monastic prayer and practice simply as an intensified form of the life to which all Christians are called.

Married Christians, perhaps even those who have attempted to model their family life after the monastic life, may doubt that such an ideal, if it is indeed an ideal, can be achieved. Others may question the validity of the monastic model, with its apparent flight from the world (even if it eventually leads to change), as an appropriate model for any Christian life today.

In any event, these two books together make a good case as to why at least some Christians are called to live the monastic life and how they might best do it.

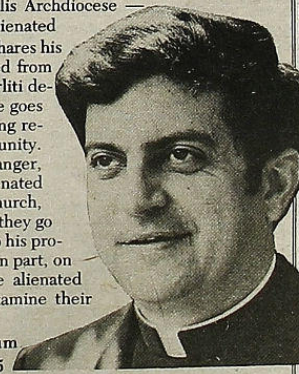
"This is evangelization at its finest, honoring each person, inviting each to honesty, supporting each in the search. Whether or not we work with alienated Catholics, these tapes are valuable for ministry, since they outline the basic love, understanding, and techniques necessary for such service. Father Forliti models graciously."  
— Loretta Girazitis,  
Director of Adult Religious Education for the Archdiocese of St. Paul, Minn.

### Love in the Food — Ministering to Alienated Catholics

Fr. John Forliti — author, pastor and director of religious education for the St. Paul-Minneapolis Archdiocese — began a program for ministry to alienated Catholics in 1977. In this series, he shares his experiences and what he has learned from ministering to this group. First, Forliti describes alienated Catholics. Then, he goes through a group process, emphasizing reconciliation, catechesis and community. He explains how to deal with the anger, hostility and mistaken notions alienated Catholics may have toward the Church, and he describes what takes place as they go through his process. Forliti winds up his program with a 12-step process (based, in part, on Alcoholics Anonymous) to help the alienated renew their spiritual life and re-examine their attitudes toward the Church.

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### Let Jesus Come, Let Santa Go Celebrating an Alternate Christmas

Milo Shannon-Thornberry

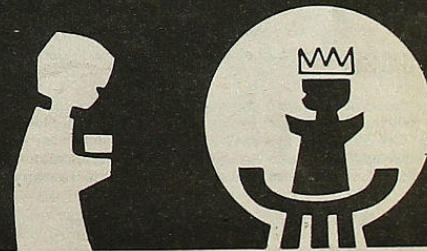
If you're weary of overstuffed Santas and an overstuffed, frantic Christmas season, here is help. These talks suggest a wide variety of actions you can take to restore the Advent and Christmas that have been displaced by commercialism.

Shannon-Thornberry is the director of Alternatives, an organization that produces resources for responsible living and celebrating. He shares both motivation and ideas about what you can do in the family, your church and the local community. These are based on the solid perspective of the season's gospel readings. A good resource for personal use and Advent programs.

You can have the life-giving Christmas you want by selecting some of the alternate ways of preparing for and celebrating the mystery of Jesus. This Advent, look toward Bethlehem instead of the North Pole for salvation.

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