

New Books

Purdy's Depression

"On Glory's Course," by James Purdy. Viking (New York, 1984). 378 pp., \$18.95. Reviewed by Joan M. Christian

NC News Service

A visitor to James Purdy's town of Fonthill would quickly discover that things are not always what they appear to be.

At first glance, Fonthill looks like a conservative suburb struggling through the Midwest Depression of the 1930s. Its people support Prohibition and the First Presbyterian Church. But, actually, Fonthill conceals a nest of illicit activity inside its shuttered houses. For it is endless gossip,

"medicinal liquor" and promiscuity that keeps the place buzzing.

The center of attention is Adele Bevington, an aging self-appointed judge of the town's manners and morals. Her own shady past and present penchants for afternoons at the sleazy cinema and for entertaining men in the middle of the night are not the best qualifications for the job, but her strength, independence and determination to live life on her own terms overshadow these facts.

Adele's quest to find the son she never knew snares a peculiar assortment of

characters into the search.

Elaine Cottrell is beautiful, penniless and very lonesome. She equally despises and admires the wealthy widow. Elaine's two fatherless sons, Ned and Alec, are taught some real lessons about life from the fabulously bejeweled Adele.

Adding a humorous touch to the cast is the Widow Hughes whose eccentric hobbies include eavesdropping.

Two men complete the ensemble: Val Dougherty, an unrefined ice-man who pays a high price for forbidden love, and Keith

Gresham, a handsome soldier who has lost his future in the trenches of the Great War.

The lives of this unusual group are all tangled up together in dormant passions and vulnerable, yet comic, obsessions. Purdy's talent as a writer lies in his ability to get beneath the surface of these complex people and come away with their true stories. It keeps the reader turning pages searching for solutions. A visit to Fonthill is a memorable trip.

Ms. Christian is a teacher and free-lance writer.

St. Francis' Way

"The Way of St. Francis," by Father Murray Bodo, OFM, Doubleday (Garden City, N.Y., 1984). 180 pp., \$12.95.

Reviewed by Father Jay C. Haskin

NC News Service

Father Bodo's latest book introduces St. Francis (born Giovanni Bernardone) by means of an overview of his life. The remainder of the work highlights various aspects of his spirituality, relating to a few episodes in his life mentioned in the sparse introductory biography.

Francis' life is not so much a discovery of life as a journey outward, or of earthly supports, as "inward toward the core of the heart." This journey must embrace the unredeemed soil within the person. Francis insists that the transcendent meaning of our lives is not a future moment but the present moment of surrendering life to Christ.

Father Bodo also brings out the Franciscan insight into mortification as "the process of saying good-bye to what is not of God, to what is preventing us from experiencing true peace and joy...and im-

plies that we die to those things we mistakenly thought were life-giving and choose what before we thought was death but now realize is truly life." Acceptance of this process slows us down and leads us to the quiet center within where the Lord speaks to the individual.

Clearly, St. Francis' life was centered totally in Jesus. The insights attempt to stimulate the reflective person in the pursuit of the life of the Spirit by infusing classical elements in the spiritual life — conversion, growth, joy and celebration.

The vision offered by the life of St. Francis and his holiness are clear but their development in "The Way of St. Francis" lacks cohesiveness, giving the work a fragmented character. Despite this shortcoming the message of St. Francis' "way" shines forward. To follow his way in the footsteps of Christ is to meet the author of life.

Father Haskin is episcopal vicar for administration and canonical affairs of the Diocese of Burlington, Vt.

Father Greeley's Women

"Angry Catholic Women," by Father Andrew M. Greeley and Mary G. Durkin. The Thomas More Press (Chicago, 1984). 213 pp., \$15.95.

Reviewed by Anne Bingham

NC News Service

Among American Catholic feminists, there are many who attend church regularly, others who don't. What accounts for that difference in behavior?

How much confidence they have in church leaders, and what images of church and women they acquired during childhood, according to this report by priest and sociologist Father Andrew Greeley and theologian Mary G. Durkin, his sister.

In his section of the book, Father Greeley describes how those conclusions emerged from a sociological investigation of data

gathered on young adults in recent years.

"Anger" is defined in terms of church attendance of young feminists, ages 18 to 30 — the greater the percentage who do not attend church regularly, the greater their anger, or alienation.

"Feminist" for the purposes of this study means someone who indicated in the surveys from which the data is extracted that they support the ordination of women and approve of two-income families, and disagree with such statements as "a preschool child is likely to suffer emotional damage if the mother works" outside the home.

On this basis, Father Greeley finds that the data indicate the angriest women to be college-educated feminists with mothers who were traditional, church-going home-

makers. Feminists with this family background are only one-third as likely to attend church regularly as women from the same background who aren't "feminist" according to the above criteria.

However, he notes, church attendance increases dramatically among college-educated feminists who had devout mothers who also held jobs outside the home while their daughters were small. Father Greeley finds suggestions in the data that the difference exists because there is a strong link between the image of church and the image of women. The effects of that link, and what "suppressor variables" change the data, are the heart of the analysis.

In the second half of the book, Ms. Durkin reflects on the findings, suggesting

ways to bridge the gap between the "theological image of the 'people of God' invoked by Vatican II" and the reality of many women's experience of the church.

Although the book's price is hefty for a format that's essentially reproduced double-spaced typescript, the price reflects a small press run aimed at a specialized audience, according to the publishers. The book includes about 60 pages of tables and figures backing up data in the earlier pages.

"Angry Catholic Women" should provide helpful insights for those involved in ministry at all levels (including the chancery level) as well as colleges, women's studies centers and religious education departments.

Ms. Bingham is a labor editor in Milwaukee.

The Gang's Treachery

"Verdict in Peking: The Trial of the Gang of Four," by David Bonavia. G.P. Putnam's Sons (New York, 1984). 225 pp., \$17.95

Reviewed by Thomas P. McDonnell

NC News Service

In the year of Orwell, 1984, some commentators have been pleased to note that the dreadful and even apocalyptic social conditions predicted by the late British novelist and essayist, way back in 1949, have not materialized after all.

This, of course, is to display a rather short-sighted view of the world. It all depends on what parts of the world you are looking at. There are innumerable versions of "1984" almost everywhere one looks,

though far more prevalent in the East than in the West.

The Soviet Union and China are but the two largest and most firmly entrenched practitioners of the repressive society en masse. To the extent that the average Westerner can know anything of what it may be like to live in the ultimately closed society, we know the Soviet alternative better than we know the Chinese.

The best available way to learn something both factually and morally true about any government, our own included, is to observe its system of justice in action. This is what we can now do: a frightening and indeed Orwellian degree in David Bonavia's "Verdict in Peking."

As Peking correspondent for The Times

of London, Bonavia was permitted to witness the "landmark" trial of the Gang of Four on the incredible grounds that it would thus exhibit to the Western world a new order of Chinese justice.

Briefly, the Gang of Four conspiracy involved the aging Mao Tse-tung's third wife, Chiang Ching, and three major accomplices in what dust-jacket blurbists describe as one of the most ruthless conspiratorial groups in history.

The Gang was accused of manipulating Mao's infamous Cultural Revolution for its own power-hungry ambitions. The members were caught red-handed, as it were, and brought to the formality of trial by showcase. The legal aspects of the proceedings can interest no one but international

lawyers and trial buffs. Justice was directly subordinated to the demands of propaganda and mercy was dispensed only on the grounds of the willingness or unwillingness of the accused to cooperate in demonstrating his or her own guilt.

The value of Bonavia's report, aside from its disclosure of Chinese trial methods, is in providing Western readers with informative portraits of the four conspirators.

Whatever the trial was meant to convey, Bonavia correctly says that it was simply a disaster.

McDonnell, retired from The Pilot, newspaper of the Archdiocese of Boston, writes extensively in the Catholic press.

...And Home and Hearth

"If this Be Love," by Calvin Miller. Harper and Row (San Francisco, 1984). 132 pp., \$10.95.

Reviewed by Mary Kenny

NC News Service

Through essays and sonnets, the Rev. Calvin Miller, a Baptist minister, shares his reflections on 25 years of married love.

The subject matter is the ordinary stresses and trials of life. In his ministry the needs of others often took precedence over personal time and "the meals grew cold...as our evenings were taken away by urgent pleas."

When children became adolescents "...their hostility rose quickly and seemed without foundation. They confronted us

often just because we were there..."

When differences arose within his congregation, "I had no idea where I would go to find a job to keep us alive after I resigned. I foundered in the darkness for an answer that would shed light on our dim future."

Mr. Miller does not give answers. Rather he celebrates the meaning in the ordinary events of life. We need imagination as "dull circumstances need bright unicorns or there will be only horses."

Often those dull circumstances blind us to life's wonder and meaning. According to myth, Sisyphus was condemned forever to push a boulder up a mountain only to watch it roll down to the bottom. Then he

had to descend and push it up again.

Yet, reflects Mr. Miller, "Was not some of the tedium of his life his own fault? At noon one day there must have come a butterfly to rest upon his stone. And for one moment, the humdrum is enlivened by bright transcending wings... Sisyphus, you blind and mundane dolt! You missed the butterfly." And so do we.

Yet tedium is not a curse but our salvation. "The regularity of things that must be done often mortars our best ideas." Thus, addressing his wife, "Let me watch you make tea on cold mornings. Tease the puppy in the garden. Cover the geraniums against first frost. I want to watch these simple acts mortar moments

into life. Thus is tomorrow born again, 90 times in every season."

And binding together all the mundane acts is the promise. "...A thousand times in those past years I had not been as loving as I had promised, a thousand thousand times I had not cherished or esteemed you. But our marriage held because all promises hold their own integrity. Though we who pledge are weak, the promises secure our wavering intentions."

A lovely book to share with a loved one, to give as a gift for a wedding or anniversary, or to turn to at those times when, in pushing the boulder up the mountain, we risk missing the butterfly.

Mrs. Kenny is a columnist.