

Augustinian theology of music merits careful study, and perhaps even, if we dare, singing celebration.

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*Spirituality without God: A Global History of Thought and Practice.* By Peter Heehs. London, UK: Bloomsbury, 2019. 286 pages. \$32.95 (paper).

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Readers of *Horizons*, whose personal lives, professional lives, and livelihoods are likely to be bound with organized religion, are unlikely to be approving of the “spiritual but not religious” phenomenon. The phrase probably brings to mind people who have no commitment to a practice or a community, but who claim a vague sense of connection to spiritual reality and who look down on religious practitioners as people with refined aesthetic tastes might look down on those with lesser tastes. The phenomenon might also look like robbery, as people freely take practices from various traditions without committing themselves to those traditions nor giving anything back to those communities. It might seem self-indulgent, as one mixes a “cocktail” of beliefs and practices “according to my own taste,” as Raimundo Panikkar once expressed the matter. For good or for ill, however, the “spiritual but not religious” phenomenon is growing, and it behooves readers of this journal to learn more about it.

Peter Heehs took on the task of tracing the historical origins of the phenomenon. Heehs is an archivist and resident at the Aurobindo Ashram in Pondicherry, India. He is a historian of thought, of domestic terrorism and communal violence in India, and of the Indian spiritual leader, Aurobindo Ghose (1872–1950). His 2008 biography, *The Lives of Sri Aurobindo*, generated nationwide controversy in India and caused, or at least contributed to, profound fissures in the community at the Aurobindo Ashram. Those controversies, which continue somewhat today, are akin to the controversies in the West generated by the quest for the historical Jesus. There is the Aurobindo or Jesus of devotion, and the Aurobindo or Jesus that historical scholarship portrays.

The first chapter of *Spirituality without God* considers proof of the existence of God. Heehs concludes that God is a dubious concept, although he takes an agnostic stance. The aim of the next three chapters is to give a comprehensive, global history of theistic and nontheistic spiritualities. The fifth chapter shows the critical role of the Enlightenment in loosening the hold of organized religion in the West. The final two chapters survey some of the

substitutes that Westerners, in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, have used to fill the place of religion. These have included the arts, occultism, Westernized versions of Hinduism and Buddhism, and various political movements. In this history, the distinctive “characteristics of modern spirituality” have emerged, which are “innerness, anti-institutionalism, individual practice, universal experiences, scientific empiricism, and the role of the body” (196). The book’s epilogue considers the limitations of “modern spirituality” and the types of critiques raised above.

The book gives a map, through time and place, of the world’s various theistic and nontheistic spiritualities. Also, though familiar with the many thinkers Heehs discusses in the final chapters, readers of *Horizons* will gain a different perspective on the history of modern thought, because he highlights aspects that are of less interest to religious believers surveying the same history. The book gives a helpful map of theistic and nontheistic spiritualities, but due, in part, to its broad and comprehensive nature, specialists in the different areas covered will find issues to challenge and argue about. Also, Heehs draws a sharp line between the concept of God and other, nontheistic concepts of spiritual reality. I suspect that many classic, Christian philosophers and mystics would not recognize this sharp distinction, nor would a significant percentage of mainline Christians today.

The “spiritual but not religious” phenomenon is growing, and readers can learn more about it through this thoughtful and knowledgeable author, who for decades has been a resident of an intentional, spiritual community.

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*Christian Mission, Contextual Theology, Prophetic Dialogue: Essays in Honor of Stephen B. Bevans.* Edited by Dale T. Irvin and Peter C. Phan. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2018. xxiv + 293 pages. \$40.00 (paper).

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Starting with the end, a storytelling tour from honoree Stephen Bevans, SVD, we discern the insightful developments of his pioneering work. With humility and good humor, Bevans invites us into the nuances of difference—the warmth of the sun as a beautiful metaphor and its opposite reception as “dangerous and even destructive” by an Indian friend. This experience from his student days sets the stage for doing theology in ways consciously incarnated in diverse contexts and illuminates the threefold organization of the book: *Christian mission* “coming into existence for the sake of the reign of God”; *contextual theology* “called to incarnate itself in every nation, [and]