

**SELF-ACTUALIZATION AND THE RADICAL GOSPEL** by Louis Roy  
*The Liturgical Press, Collegeville, Minnesota, 2002. PP viii + 72p.*  
**US \$9.95 Pbk.**

This is a truly fascinating and provocative little book from the pen of the Dominican scholar Louis Roy, associate professor of theology at Boston College. It deals with the tension between the demands of love of self and love of other (God and neighbour). Roy's concern is about how to reconcile our needs for personal growth and psychological well-being with the radical and absolutist demands of the Christian Gospel with its call to self-denial and self-sacrificing love. This tension can be felt acutely by Christians in today's so-called post-modern culture in which psychological humanism based on self-affirmation, the acceptance of one's limitations, moderation and the search for a good quality of life seems to clash head-on with the radicalism of a Gospel-message that emphasises religious passion, self-transcendence, and self-giving towards God and neighbour. Roy expresses the tension in the book's title 'Self-Actualization and the Radical Gospel'. His fundamental thesis is that self-actualisation and self-transcendence represent two authentically human yet entirely complimentary directions in which the human subject operates. The tension between the two is neither incompatible nor ultimately reconcilable: an authentic approach is about holding both directions together at once. Yet if this tension is held critically and responsibly, it will be a constant source of reflection and meditation, a spur to growth in virtue, and a fruitful help to psychological, social and spiritual integration.

Roy writes succinctly in chapters that are neither too long nor too short, each an ideal length for a daily meditation or assignment of spiritual reading. The seven chapters follow on one another dialectically: false or excessive radicalism and false or excessive developmentalism (Chapters One and Two), then an authentic account of self-actualisation (Chapter Three) and a discussion of the radical demands of the Gospel and how to interpret it in a balanced way (Chapters Four and Five). Chapter Six offers a theological synthesis and Chapter Seven some practical advice on how to live out in daily life the tension between the two directions, and in particular how to balance the psychic, the social and the spiritual. The text is sometimes dense, but there are helpful sub-headings in the margins alongside the main paragraphs highlighting the principle points. The author draws explicitly and implicitly on the thought of Bernard Lonergan and on the whole of the classical Thomist-Aristotelian tradition. He successfully manages to effect a task fraught with pitfalls, namely to bring into alignment the insights of depth-psychology with traditional Catholic spirituality, without compromise to the best of both. Moreover, Roy laces his writing with practical wisdom that is evidently the fruit of his own prayer and reflection. He offers too a trenchant critique of so many of our contemporary ills and attitudes by radicalising them and showing where they lead, and in this way he is

able to present multiple correctives to misconceptions popularly held or unreflectively entertained. This is a profound little book. It is an excellent little book. The author draws into a remarkable synthesis a huge and varied range of sources from the history of psychology, philosophy, theology and spirituality. The title might be a little off-putting for some and there are some occasional glitches. The practice of switching the genders of pronouns to maintain an inclusive language can be distracting and I would have preferred another solution. Again, Roy rightly presents Jesus as the model human, divinised by the Holy Spirit whilst not fleeing human finitude (p. 7), yet, in his exegesis of the story of Zacchaeus (Luke 19: 1-10), his statement that "the incomparable presence of Jesus.—rather, of God, who saves through the humanity of Jesus.—.gave Zacchaeus the motivation he needed to be converted" (p. 33), seems ambiguous in its Christological implications. Also, Chapter Five ('The Radical Gospel: An Interpretation') was, I suppose, like the rest of this book ecumenical in intention, but as a Roman Catholic, I would have appreciated something on the grace of Christ available and communicated through the sacraments, thus enabling disciples to imitate their Master's radicalism. For instance, in the last sections on how prayer enhances our capacity for forgiveness (p. 47f), there might have been something en passant about the Sacrament of Reconciliation. His text is demanding and despite his masterful and competent handling of complex topics, I wonder about which audience the book is intended for.

Yet Roy's thesis and his conclusions are too important to be missed. This is not a long book: readers would be well advised to consume it slowly. Living beings function according to rhythms, the author contends (p. 59). He unmasks some of the most popular aphorisms from both the secular (e.g. 'Be autonomous.—.be yourself.—.if that offends others, so much the worse for them') and the Christian domains (e.g. 'Only take care to love.—.give constantly.—.that is the key to happiness'), revealing their truly impoverishing, excessive and banal character, and how they are frequently based on false temporal or ontological priorities (e.g. individualism before altruism, subjectivity over objectivity, and so on). Instead, Roy proposes holding together dynamically such rhythms of self-realisation and self-transcendence as prayer and commitment, solitude and solidarity, giving and receiving, being with and being for, leisure and work. We need to be constantly discerning the right ways forward, and constantly willing to change and to make occasional readjustments and reorientations. Indeed, this is exactly what can be seen in the lives of the saints: that is, in the 'real' lives lived by the saints behind their hagiographies.

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