

Spiritual Models

Soldier, Sage, Saint, by Robert C. Neville,
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\$7.50).

THIS IS A philosophic study of human spiritual development, especially as reflected in the models of soldier, sage, and saint. Neville makes it clear at once that he is speaking as a philosopher seeking to understand mankind's spiritual traditions, not as a guru testifying to his private experiences. The advantage of making a philosophic analysis of traditions is that it discusses funded experiences accessible to every reflective mind.

In considering any study of spirituality, we are likely to raise two preliminary questions. Is spirituality the same as religion? And which type of spiritual outlook is taken as the primary pattern? Neville faces both questions forthrightly at the very outset. He distinguishes between a religion or organized church and a religious attitude or way of life. Church membership is not the same as a religious way of living, although the former may encourage the latter's growth. A religious mode of life encompasses three human concerns: ritual action, cosmological interpretation of the world through myths and symbols, and personal spiritual development. The difficulty today is that politics channels much of our ritual action, and that science and

philosophy provide much of the interpretation of the world. This leaves spiritual life to develop sometimes within the churches and sometimes apart from them. We are also acutely aware today of the pluralism of religious cultures and spiritual traditions. It is not a matter of choosing a Western pattern of spirituality instead of an Eastern one, or the converse, but rather of interweaving these patterns and thus discovering the common human spiritual tradition amidst the diversity of religions and cultures.

Neville's next problem is the methodological one of establishing philosophic controls over such a complex project as that of discerning mankind's primary spiritual paths toward personal liberation and integrity in the world. His criteria are three. Use formal categories that are defensible and coherent; describe aspects of spiritual life that have empirically real bases; and focus pragmatically on spiritual ideals that are effective enrichments of our lives. To meet these requirements, a choice is made of three models of human existence that arouse admiration and spiritual emulation on a worldwide basis. The human tradition of spirituality becomes concrete in the models of the soldier, the sage, and the saint. The core chapters of the book examine these archetypes from the standpoint of their contribution to the individual's spiritual growth.

Despite the destructiveness of war, the figure of the *soldier* arouses recognition of one spiritual theme which Neville identifies as "purification of will." Thus the parables and spiritual exercises of East and West counsel us to develop a character analogous to the soldier's self-discipline. This expresses itself in a tension between reaching integral unity of one's own self-image and abandoning private indulgence for a larger cause and a wider community of persons. Somewhat as a counterbalance to the stress on will is the *sage's* appeal to our intelligence. Spiritual life is a way toward enlightenment and true witness. Once more, there is a paradoxical pull bet-

ween becoming enlightened about one's own self or the interior life and about the values and deceptions of the world. Moreover, what the sage learns in these areas has to be communicated, put at the service of others whether in the smaller setting of oral teaching to disciples or in the larger community reached by his writings.

As for the *saint*, Neville finds the characterizing word to be "perfection," taken not in a static sense but as an ideal and constant goad. Holy persons testify to a gradation of values even among good objectives, an ordering of loves even among the most satisfying affections, and a continual search after closer communion with God. We sometimes misjudge the severe self-appraisals of a saint, because we overlook the continual process of comparison and development.

Whereas there is a perennial quality in the spiritual models themselves, there is a historically conditioned relationship of ourselves to them. Neville's last two chapters face up to this problem of relating oneself to these models under contemporary conditions. The search after spiritual liberation is affected concretely by the contention of Nietzsche and Marx that religious beliefs weaken our hold on human values and derail us from meeting our responsibilities in the world. In this respect, the countertheme of sage and soldier suggests that the spiritual life requires an understanding of the world and a fidelity to human obligations. And from the saint's attitude, we gain confidence in reconciling divine power and human freedom. All these models will flourish better today, if their heroism and meditation and art of living are more closely integrated with the human community in all its dimensions.

This is a thoughtful, clearly expressed, and well organized treatment of the need and models for spirituality. Just as it draws liberally upon the many spiritual writings of East and West, so its argument has a broad appeal to people in many cultures today. Neville sums up the main function of his spiritual models. "They provide

orientation points for understanding the many dimensions of the struggle. They even render it possible for twentieth-century pilgrims to see themselves as making the same journey as countless others in ages long past and cultures astonishingly diverse." To try to develop oneself spiritually is one of the permanent aims of our human race.

Reviewed by JAMES COLLINS