

Review

Reviewed Work(s): *Becoming a Woman* by Valerie Vance Dillon; *Becoming a Man* by William J. Bausch

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THE FURROW

this memorial work. It is memorial as the eucharist is. It lives in memory. It is a book which is short and humble and generous. It is brave – for it tells truths. A work which brings us from a place of skulls and desecrated bodies to the unexpected light which breaks from that darkness as Hope walks on in tattered shrouds. This book is about the companionship which forms around that time when shattered hopes give way to a love far beyond thought and dreams. This book invites us to join that company of the saints who are today's victims.

If we can only hear its words we can build a Church and community in which the idols are smashed and all the children of the future, in El Salvador or Ireland, have the freedom to be themselves free. A place and time where no more guns are targetted on living flesh, where the generous earth is generously shared with all. That hope continues. The love which makes it possible whispers away. This book is its gospel and its act and its revelation. A letter written in the accent and grace of El Salvador, The Saviour. The book might save us.

PATRICK O'BRIEN

Skehana, Co. Galway

Becoming a Woman. Valerie Vance Dillon. Dublin: Columba Press, 1990. Pp. 157 + vii. Price IR£5.95.

Becoming a Man. William J. Bausch. Mystic, Connecticut: Twenty-Third Publications, 1988. Distributed in Ireland by the Columba Press. Pp. 307 + xiv. Price IR£6.95.

The Christian view of sexuality is a wholesome one, yet many people perceive it to be negative and oppressive. How often we hear people speak on radio or television about their being 'liberated' from the strict Catholic upbringing of their youth. These people are not all cranks. A past emphasis on sin and failure in sexual matters left many good Christians with a fear of their own sexuality. This fear generated scruples and unnecessary worries. All of this is not just a past phenomenon: the negative way in which way some Church teaching is presented can still cause some conscientious Christians unnecessary anxiety. Many Church people still give the impression of not being at ease when discussing sexuality. The scars of past preaching and teaching are still with us, but now the task is to convince an increasingly sceptical audience that the Christian notion of sexuality is both positive and life-enriching, not just a list of negative rules and regulations. So any resources which can help us are very welcome. The two books reviewed provide basic information, guidance and attitudes on sex for teenagers. Both authors talk of young people about their sexuality in terms that are credible, down-to-earth and faithful to the best of Catholic teaching.

Valerie Vance Dillon is Family Life Director for the Archdiocese of Indianapolis. She is married, and the mother of four daughters. She offers a straight-forward Christian concept of female sexuality, written in a simple conversational style. The book is divided into three sections

– ‘Who I am’, ‘What I am Becoming’, and ‘Who I Choose to Be’. The chapters deal with major areas of concern for today’s girls, such as bodily changes, boyfriends, marriage, independence, sexual diseases and abortion. Dillon discusses infatuation, petting and the like with clarity and ease. She uses stories and real life situations to give practical suggestions for dealing with the problems and joys of growing up female.

William Bausch is an author who needs no introduction. A nationally heralded parish priest in the United States and a popular writer on matters of personal faith and Church life, Bausch in *Becoming a Man* speaks to teenage boys in everyday upbeat terms. It is a gentle, non-judgemental book which takes a clear position on chastity without being preachy or negative. Bausch tackles the issue head-on. Masturbation, pre-marital sex, AIDS and contraception are all treated thoroughly, openly, with sensitivity and even at times with a sense of humour. Common sense pervades his discussion of everything from wet dreams to menstruation. The author treats promiscuity with good-sense teaching. He successfully bridges the gap between gospel values and peer pressure in a very well-written book.

Both these books are to be recommended for their open chatty style. The message is positive: being a Christian means working through the pain and joy of being a sexual human being, not living in fear of one’s feelings. Dillon and Bausch exude warmth and they write in a colloquial and engaging way, making a convincing case for sexual responsibility. These are informative helpful books that parents and teachers should give to their teenagers. Both books deserve places on every parish bookstand.

PATRICK CONNOLLY

Enniskillen

Remembering Matt Talbot. Mary Purcell. Dublin: Veritas Publications. Pp. 142. Price £6.95.

The book under review is a re-issue of a book first published in 1954. The writer has taken the opportunity to include new material that has emerged in the intervening years and to re-arrange the dates of certain incidents based on an up-to-date re-appraisal of the available evidence. The result is a fascinating account of the life and times of a Dublin working man, a slave to drink in his younger days who, having taken the pledge, went on to lead a life of extraordinary fidelity to what he saw as God’s will for his life. He is presented to us as seen through the eyes of those who knew him well – his workmates, his friends, his family – and their impressions of him, mainly favourable, are often quoted at considerable length, hence the word ‘remembering’ in the title. These quotations were, for me, one of the great strengths of the book and it was interesting to read that one of the most important of those quoted died as recently as 1985.