

of a burning house in which three firemen are trapped; feeling an urgent need to pray for these firemen's lives, she spends several hours in prayer. She discovers, days later, that one of these men in her prayers was a co-worker's husband. In another story, a family with young children builds a cross from two old telephone poles, adding lights to shine from their mountain home for the entire community. Years later, when the couple's adult daughter, recently widowed, returns home for Christmas, she asks that the cross be lighted. Yet, after a frustrating day of working with the old, broken-down equipment to try to light the cross, the family gives up. The mother then prays for a miracle, asking God to show his love in a special way that night, and when her husband kicks the power box in frustration, the lights come on, in spite of the broken equipment. To this day, the cross lights up automatically every evening, and, despite the constant use of electricity, the couple's electric bill has never increased. Anderson's collection of such stories reminds readers, with little subtlety that there is a loving God that sometimes reaches out in mysterious and inexplicable ways. (Nov.)

RELIGION AND THE AMERICAN EXPERIENCE:

A Social and Cultural History.

Donald C. Swift, M.E. Sharpe, \$66.95 (320p) ISBN 0-7656-0133-8; paper \$25.95-0134-6 (Religion/History)

Swift weaves a grand narrative that places religion at the center of over 200 years of American experience. The author addresses the considerable diversity of American religion by means of numerous subplots. In these subplots, Swift explores such topics as "Early African American Religion," "Native American Religion," "Women, the Churches, and Empowerment," "Beyond the Mainstream: Immigrants, Nativism, and Cultural Conflict" and "Fundamentalists vs. Modernists." On the one hand, Swift succeeds in offering a clear overview of the historical development of American religion, and his writing is accessible to general audiences. On the other hand, Swift's claim in the introduction that "textbooks at all levels of education do not reflect the growing importance of religion as a means of understanding American culture, politics, and society" is a sweeping claim for which he does not offer evidence; it also raises a problem that his own book does not satisfactorily remedy. Moreover, because the book grew out of lecture notes, it flows awkwardly and too often scants its treatment of the past in favor of the present. In the end, Swift's book offers little to distinguish it from equally accessible accounts that synthesize the same body of material. (Nov.)

TURNING POINTS: Decisive

Moments in the History of Christianity

Mark A. Noll, Baker, \$17.99 (320p)

ISBN 0-8010-5778-7 (Christianity/History)

Based on his substantial experience teaching the history of Christianity at Wheaton College, Noll has organized the formidable body of material that must be included in any historical survey of Christianity around 12 turning points: the destruction of Jerusalem (70); the Council of Nicea (325); the Council of Chalcedon (451); the Benedictine Rule (540); the coronation of Charlemagne (800); the Great Schism (1054); the Diet of Worms (1521); the English Act of Supremacy (1534); the founding of the Jesuits (1534); the conversion of John Wesley (1738); the French Revolution (1789-1799); and the Edinburgh Missionary Conference (1910). Noll's introduction includes a cogent argument for his approach as well as a candid recognition that any selection of turning points will exclude important events with equally valid claims as turning points. Noll's treatment of the material is evenhanded, engaging and illuminating. This will be a useful text for readers seeking a historical framework within which to understand their Christian faith. (Nov.)

➔ OPUS DEI: Leadership and Vision in Today's Catholic Church

Vittorio Messori, trans. by Gerald Malsbary, Regnery, \$27.50 (186p) ISBN 0-89526-450-1 (Christianity/History)

Messori, who collaborated with Pope John Paul II on *Crossing the Threshold of Hope*, is a sympathetic mouthpiece for one of the most controversial organizations in post-Vatican II Catholicism. Opus Dei is a lay organization within the Catholic church. According to Opus Dei's own statements, its members "carry out their apostolic work through the practice of their ordinary professional work." Messori simply interviews representatives of Opus Dei and records their descriptions of the organization. William A. Schmitt, Opus Dei's director of communications, even contributes an introduction to the book. While Opus Dei has been criticized by former members (e.g., Maria del Carmen Tapia in *Beyond the Threshold*, Continuum) for its secretiveness, its moral authoritarianism and its emphasis on the laity's ability to interpret church doctrine and scripture for themselves, Messori does not take into account such criticisms. By letting the organization speak for itself, Messori has produced a rather lifeless, unremarkable and un insightful account of a controversial religious organization. (Nov.)

MY BROTHER JOSEPH:

The Spirit of a Cardinal and the Story of a Friendship

Eugene Kennedy, St. Martin's, \$17.95

(176p) ISBN 0-312-17118-8 (Religion/Biography)

Eugene Kennedy met Joseph Bernardin in 1967, in the bubbling aftermath of Vatican II; both were members of a powerhouse panel that would study the American priesthood. That initial meeting sparked a lifelong friendship between the author and Chicago's future Cardinal. It is Kennedy's real kinship with Bernardin that makes this book different from the usual dashed-off celebrity biography. Through stories that are both touchingly personal and historic, we come to know and feel Bernardin's integrity, honesty and compassion. Kennedy describes a man who rose from simple beginnings to national stature by virtue of his virtues—foremost among which was his ability to wield power responsibly by letting go of his own self-interest. Kennedy sees this Christian theme of self-emptying as the key to Bernardin's life, the virtue that tempered the Cardinal's personal and public struggle with false accusations of sexual abuse and with the knowledge of his certain death from cancer. Kennedy also shows the Bernardin who labored on public policy issues and desired to "speak as a moral force to the whole country." Kennedy's book reminds us how Joseph Cardinal Bernardin did just that not only in his writings but also in his very habit of being. (Nov.)

SELF AND SOUL:

A Woman's Guide to Enhancing Self-Esteem Through Spirituality

Adele Wilcox, Daybreak, \$19.95 (192p)

ISBN 0-87596-446-X

(Christianity/Spirituality)

Wilcox, an ordained United Methodist minister, has written a very useful guide for women suffering from low self-esteem, which she says is often caused by a constant drumbeat of teachings that, she says, are oppressive and are inherent in Christian religious tradition. Wilcox challenges religious teachings that assert that women have less value to society and the church than men by showing that these teachings are seldom grounded in the original languages of the Bible. She contends that women played significant roles as missionaries, clergy and even ordained bishops in the early Christian communities. Wilcox uses what she calls the "wisdom of spirituality" to counter what she sees as the effects of traditional Christian teachings on women's self-es-