CATHOLIC SPIRITUALITY,
ITS HISTORY AND CHALLENGE
By James J. Bacik
New York: Paulist Press
Reviewed by Joaquin C. Yap, Jr.

James Bacik’s book is a welcome addition to his growing roster of short but accessible and highly informative studies of contemporary spirituality. Having previously written Spirituality in Transition (1996) and Spirituality in Action (1997), he now discusses the relationship between spirituality and theology, a recurring theme in what is ostensibly a historical survey of (primarily American) Catholic spiritual experience. As he puts it, he wishes to explore “the role of theology in channeling the energy of [today’s] spiritual revival in constructive directions” (ix).

In his “Introduction,” Bacik gives a helpful definition of what he himself admits is an elusive term. Spirituality, he writes, refers both to lived experience and a distinct academic discipline. As lived experience (which is Bacik’s main concern), spirituality can be described in terms of one’s relationship to the triune God: “It has to do with
worshiping God the Father, putting on the mind of Christ and listen-
ing to the Holy Spirit" (ix). For Bacik, spirituality has both centrip-
etal and centrifugal dimensions; while one is drawn into a deeper and
more intimate relationship with God, one is also propelled outward
in vital action in the world at large.

The book is unevenly divided into two parts. Part One, entitled
"The Relationship between Spirituality and Theology: History and
Theory," is the more substantial section, yet it is only 75 pages com-
pared to 100 pages of Part Two, which is entitled "Practical Applica-
tions: Theological Reflections on Common Experiences," and con-
sists of twenty-seven brief essays on various subjects previously
written by Bacik. To the author's credit, these short articles (ranging
in topic from prayer and meditation to John XXIII and the CDF's
Dominus Iesus) certainly display a happy marriage of spirituality and
theology; here one finds penetrating spiritual reflection grounded in
solid theological understanding.

Karl Rahner is Bacik's primary theological mentor. Rahner, along
with Sandra Schneiders and Bernard Lonergan, is given a wide hear-
ing as a theologian who succeeded in bridging the gap between the-
ology and spirituality. Bacik writes: "Theology done well is always
spiritually relevant. For Rahner, the way to close the gap between
spirituality and theology is to do theology better. At its best, theol-
ogy is nourished by prayer and leads to prayer" (63). This line alone
makes reading the book a worthwhile endeavor.

James Bacik combines erudition, broad knowledge of various
topics, a clear and elegant style, good training in systematic theol-
ogy, and a profound regard for the spiritual life. This is not to say
that the book is flawless. It is all too clearly written from an Ameri-
can point of view; the statistical trends are all drawn from the expe-
rience of U.S. Catholics. Bacik himself acknowledges this in his "In-
roduction"; nevertheless, one wishes for a more wide-ranging and
"catholic" perspective. The author is occasionally guilty of easy la-
beling ("The average parish contains conservatives who prefer tradi-
tional forms of piety such as the rosary, benediction and Marian de-
votions, and progressives who are more attuned to Scripture reading,
liturgical participation and faith-sharing groups”), and more consistently susceptible to citing Rahner ad infinitum. Still, this slim volume makes for easy and informative reading; in itself, it is a fine example of how spirituality and theology can and should combine in a profitable way.

SEXUAL DIVERSITY AND CATHOLICISM: TOWARD THE DEVELOPMENT OF MORAL THEOLOGY
Edited by Patricia Beattie Jung with Joseph Andrew Corey
Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press
Reviewed by James T. Bretzke

Just a few years ago I was engaged in a conversation with a colleague on theses for a comprehensive exam in sexual ethics which he had drawn largely from Gerald Kelly’s 1941 classic Modern Youth and Chastity—widely used in Catholic colleges in the 1940s and 1950s. Kelly’s work contained five crystal clear and practical moral principles meant to guide young people in choosing the good and avoiding the evil in the sexual arena, such as “every directly venereal action is against the law of God, and a serious sin of impurity.” The remaining four principles were likewise concerned directly in one way or the other with aspects of legitimate and illegitimate causing of venereal pleasure. This moral message was simple and clear: sexuality boiled down to sex, sex was dangerous since it ultimately concerned when one could and could not licitly engage in venereal pleasure at the peril of one’s soul. My colleague maintained that Kelly’s principles, founded on the unchanging pillars of human nature and the natural law, were just as valid today as they had been in the days of our parents who had used this book in their college theology courses.

Clear as this version of sexual ethics may have been, the theology of the human person developed in Vatican II, and continued through the writings of John Paul II, the Catechism of the Catholic Church, and reiterated most recently in the Congregation of the