

***All Out of Faith: Southern Women on Spirituality.* Wendy Reed and Jennifer Horne, editors. Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2006; xv +198 pages; ISBN 0-8173-1534-9; \$43.50US (cloth).**

In *All Out of Faith*, editors Wendy Reed and Jennifer Horne have collected sixteen essays from southern women writers. The contributors, mostly novelists and poets, have produced reminiscences filled with both pathos and humour, detailing their personal experiences with southern religion and spirituality. The goal of the editors is an inclusiveness of experience. Some essays are written by those who remain committed to traditional religious structures, including Pauli Murray, an Episcopalian minister, and Jessica Roskin, a Jewish cantor; some detail personal struggles within and against these structures, such as Cassandra King's "The Making of a Preacher's Wife"; while others suggest an alternative path to spirituality. The editors' hope is that "these stories, presented together, sound out some unspoken truths, so that those who may not understand belief in easy terms may understand they are not alone" (xii).

The thread that links each of these spiritual journeys is a sense of place. Poet Jeanie Thompson writes that "as a Southerner, I inherently trust place, I recognize it and return to it" (170). In a region long known as the "Bible Belt" it is perhaps not surprising that southern identity and spiritual identity should have become intertwined. The essays of Barbara Kingsolver and Frances Mayes are particularly evocative in making the link between place and self. Other themes that echo through the essays include art and the creative process, sexuality and coming of age.

Other elements that have been seen as fundamental to southern identity - racialization, poverty, and an omnipresent history - are less fully explored. Diane McWhorter's essay is an exception. Taking the reader to a Birmingham engulfed in the Civil Rights movement, her essay evokes a specific time and place. In most of the essays, however, the personal is only tangentially linked to a political and historical context. Sunday mornings are still said to be the most segregated time in the South; each reader will have to decide if the editors' relatively limited focus on racial issues is a sign of progress, or a diminution of a central theme in southern history.

As a historian of the American South, I would have appreciated the editors doing more to provide a clear contextual framework, by situating each essay in time as well as in place, and arranging the essays to emphasize commonalities and divisions in experience. The alphabetical arrangement allows each essay stand on its own, but it does not provide a clear sense of any larger themes. But then, in her essay novelist Vicki Covington reminds the reader that this is not meant to be a series of "scholarly papers," but a collection of

remembrances (27). Those looking for beautifully written personal narratives relating to women's spiritual explorations will find many gems in this book.

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