

Samuel SSF, John Phillips and Father Terry Tastard, (Eds)

My God My All - A Friar's Journey

Brother Bernard - 1928 - 2007

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Friends of Brother Bernard will welcome this book, and those who did not know him well have here an opportunity to know more of the 'real' man, the epithet given by the Bishop of London in his foreword. The editors are to be congratulated on a collection which gives us all sides of a complex personality, with a profound spirituality, great abilities and a marvellously caring way with people.

If such a combination was held together with what some felt a too emotional side, we should not be surprised. As he says, it seemed terrible to deny other parts of himself and other attractive alternatives in his choice to answer God's call to become a friar; and that decision has to be renewed all through life.

The book is divided into three principal sections: the first part is a selection of his writings and talks; the second autobiographical; the third a group of tributes from friends. Bernard, the person, shows through the whole book: his considerable intellect in part one; more of the vulnerable man in part two. Never one to pull his punches, he allows himself to be seen not only in the driving energy which produced so much and was sometimes a problem for others, but in his anxious ambivalence in uncertainty.

He writes of his confusion when offered the possibility of election as Archbishop of Brisbane. Perhaps God wanted his obvious gifts for the Church? But was it in accord with his own conviction of what Francis stood for? He tells how his spiritual director helped and, once made, the decision stood for similar tests.

He was, as a friend put it, a humble man, never reticent about his own shortcomings, and moving, in later life, into a 'theology of diminution'.

While not, as Father Terry points out, able to take much application of psychology for himself, he gained some light on his own half-buried anger and its origins. Clearly his self-knowledge and study of human nature and related data gave him the astute insights which made him so much appreciated as a spiritual director.

He was thoroughly human, and as one contributor says, he needed to be loved. As indeed we all do.

Elizabeth CSF