



Book Review of *Bloomfield Avenue: A Jewish-Catholic Jersey Girl's Spiritual Journey*, Linda Mercadante, Cambridge, Massachusetts: Cowley Publications, 2006; 211 pages; \$14.95 U.S.

By Wayne Northey

My wife and I each read the entire book in one day. This is endorsement enough! I was years before a fellow seminary student with Linda (Regent College, Vancouver, Canada), and after three decades, last summer renewed acquaintance with her and her husband. We anticipated eagerly the book's publication. It obviously did not disappoint!

Linda was born into a family of European Jewish and Italian Catholic heritage. Sorting that out has been lifelong. Likewise, her quest for God, or as theologian Karl Barth and poet Francis Thompson would have it, *God's quest for her*, has dominated her journey through childhood Roman Catholic piety, early adult atheism, adult personal extended family and marital struggles during her return to God, and decades of teaching God at a Methodist seminary in Ohio.

Along the way, Linda doggedly remains truthful, refuses all forms of quick-fix spirituality, and wrestles with major issues including male-female relationships within the church (her first book was a seminary Master's thesis and groundbreaking), and addiction and abuse (her third book was on spiritual roots of addiction and recovery).

The story reads like a novel, grips like a bestseller, and inspires like a devotional classic. The writing is crisp, evocative, and clear.

At many points in the author's life and storytelling, she expresses a sense that maybe at last "this" – new relationship, rediscovered faith (like Marcus Borg) again for the first time, renewed marriage commitment, etc. – would eventuate in capturing the elusive dream of life fulfillment. It never turns out that way. In the last chapter before the Epilogue she writes: "The way I see it, I'm not exactly a poster child for the 'victorious Christian life'." In response, too many "poster children" for the Christian faith have so defaulted on "the victorious Christian life" that her avowal is refreshingly authentic.

Linda herself suspects there are really none such, writing: "I speculate that deep down no one is really like that, for when we peel off the layers of our personality styles, cultural backgrounds, childhood issues, and current baggage, we find a human condition characterized by a pervasive anxiety... As Saint Augustine said, our hearts *are* truly restless until they rest in God... So if God didn't keep the divine arms around us, we'd never get any rest at all."

Bloomfield Avenue is rich witness to the biblical affirmation: "The eternal God is your refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms (Deuteronomy 33:27)."

I'll close with this gem from her musings:

Ultimately, however, it became clear that wholeness is something only God can provide. I had simply responded to the lure of God. God reached out to me and drew me along an often misty and rocky path. I was hungry and needy, a condition that makes the divine work a lot easier. Even though following this lure has been disruptive, confusing, and sometimes painful, I

could not resist it. For me, this path proved the only way to unity and joy. Divine grace also supplied an essential insight: Happiness and joy are not the same. Wholeness does bring an undercurrent of the security and peace we call joy, but it often comes at the cost of simple contentment. In fact, the trajectory of joy and of sadness can often cross paths on the journey toward wholeness.