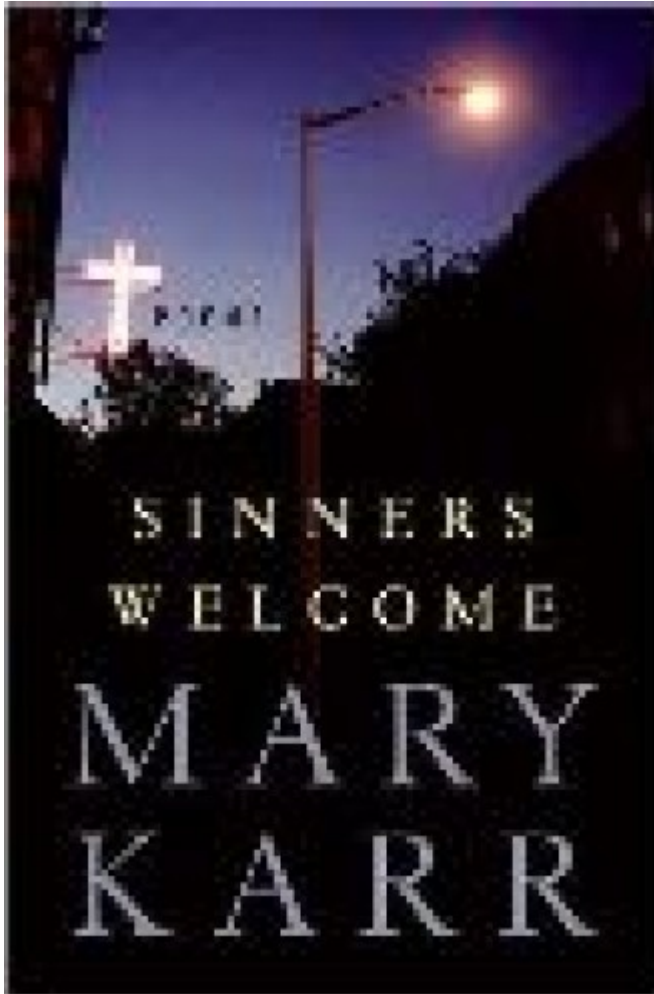


BookMarks

Books in the [July 25, 2006](#) issue

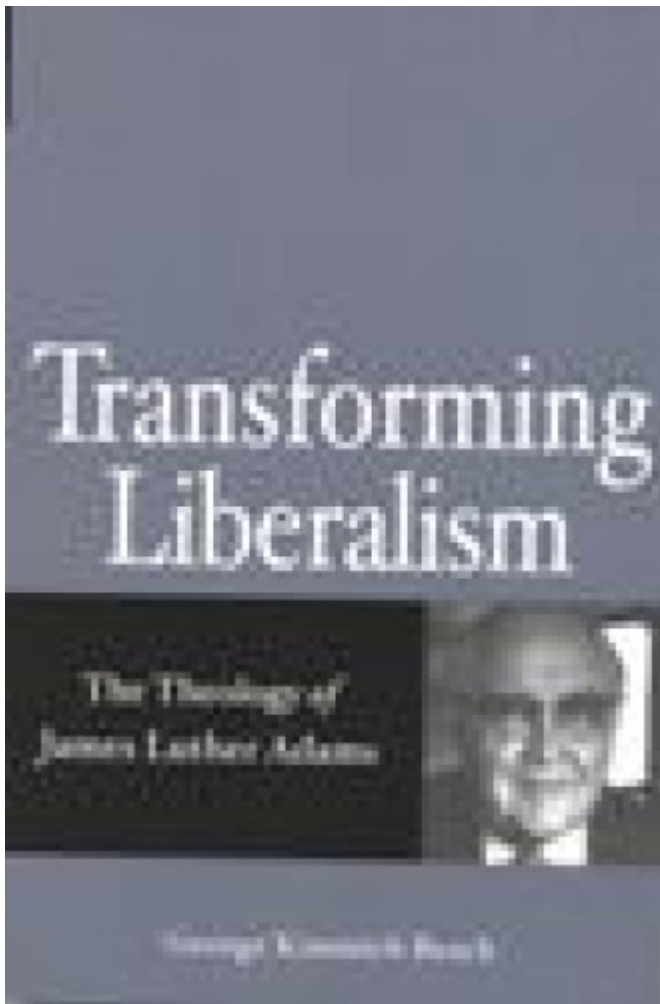
In Review



Sinners Welcome: Poems

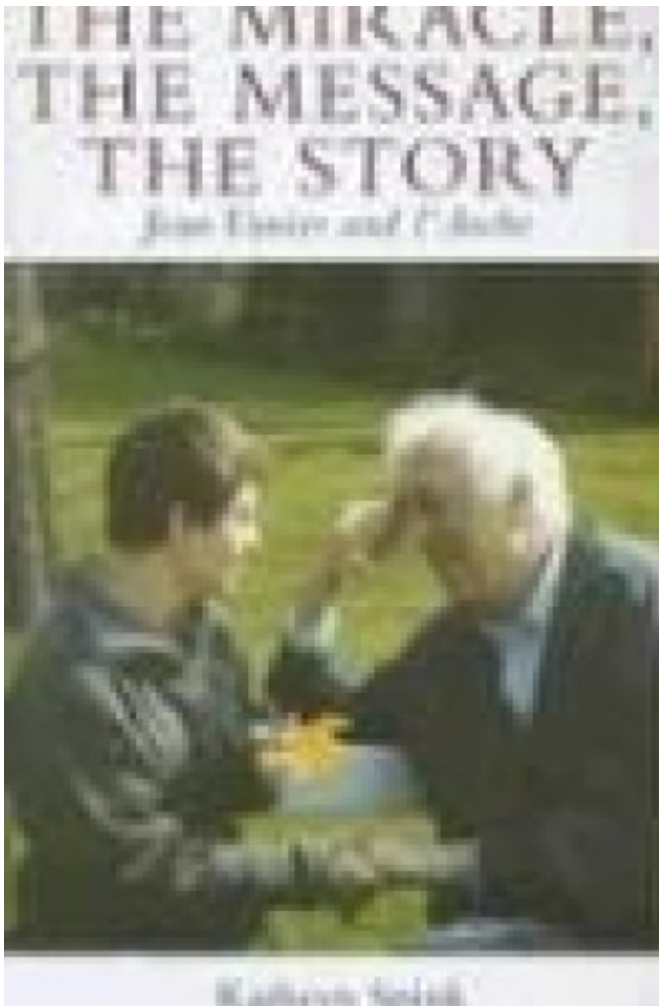
Mary Karr

HarperCollins



Transforming Liberalism: The Theology of James Luther Adams.

George Kimmich Beach
Skinner House



The Miracle, the Message, the Story: Jean Vanier and I'Arche.

Kathryn Spink

Paulist

This is the fourth collection of poetry published by Mary Karr, who also authored *The Liars' Club*, her best-selling memoir. Formerly an “undiluted agnostic,” she converted to Catholicism in 1996. In an afterword Karr says that what drew her to the Catholic faith is its carnality. “There is a *body* on the cross in my church.” In a poem titled “Disgraceland,” she confesses: “You are loved, someone said. / Take that and eat it.” Spread throughout this collection is a cycle of poems about Christ that were inspired by Ignatian prayer exercises.

James Luther Adams did not write books. His ideas are scattered in numerous essays and addresses, published in three collections edited by George Kimmich Beach, a former student of Adams's. In *Transforming Liberalism*, Beach presents a systematic

treatment of Adams's thought, incorporating many quotations from Adams and anecdotes about him. A Unitarian theologian whose work spanned much of the 20th century, Adams rejected the fundamentalism in which he was reared. Still, he was inclined toward what the Germans call "Aufhebung," the process of reincorporating in a new form what has been negated. Rebuking Unitarians who take great pride in a "creedless faith," Adams said: "The trouble with being a Unitarian is, you can't flunk." Liberalism, he believed, needs both doctrine and discipline.

If Jean Vanier is not a saint, no one is. He was well into his 30s before he found his true vocation, which was to develop group homes for people with disabilities. His first such home was begun in 1964 in Trosly-Breuil, France. Now there are over 125 l'Arche communities around the world. Vanier was motivated by the conviction that people with disabilities are some of the most misunderstood and rejected of human beings, that they need both a home and a family, and that providing such a place for them is an imperative of the gospel. Kathryn Spink, who has written biographies of Mother Teresa and Brother Roger of the Taizé Community, capably captures the spirit of Vanier the man, the influences that shaped his life and values, and the institutional development of l'Arche communities. Unfortunately, Spink offers only brief glimpses into the lives of disabled persons and the families from which they come.