

# A UNITER OF NATIONS

## HAMMARSKJÖLD

### A Life

By Roger Lipsey

University of Michigan Press. 890p \$35

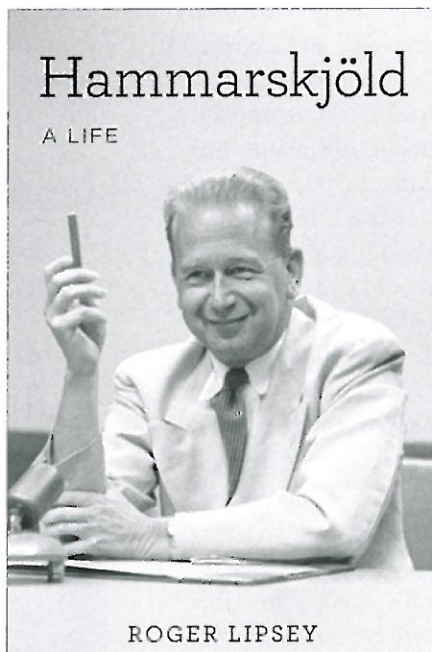
Soon after U.N. Secretary General Dag Hammarskjöld died in a still-controversial plane crash in Africa in 1961, his friend Per Lin found a type-written spiritual journal on the nightstand of Hammarskjöld's New York City apartment. Attached to the manuscript was a note from Hammarskjöld addressed to another friend, Leif Belfrage, requesting him to determine whether this journal should be published.

Belfrage decided affirmatively and the result was the appearance in the United States in 1964 of one of the spiritual classics of the 20th century, Hammarskjöld's *Vägmärken*, or *Markings*. In 1972 Hammarskjöld's professional associate at the United Nations, Brian Urquhart, published a definitive account of the secretary general's public life.

It is the goal of Roger Lipsey to reconcile these two earlier books, examining as much as evidence allows how the inner life influenced the actions of the outer man. The seeds of Hammarskjöld's inner life were the clergymen and scholars in his maternal ancestry, while public service came naturally to the son of a Swedish prime minister.

Lipsey's book will intrigue students of the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius Loyola. Although Hammarskjöld was a Lutheran, his life paralleled Ignatius' idea of a contemplative in action. He especially exemplified the exercise known as the "Call of the King." Beneath an outward confidence in the force of the United Nations for good in the world

was a deep sense of striving to serve Jesus Christ, a conviction that his international work was but a means to that end. Perhaps this spiritual detachment from his job was precisely what made Hammarskjöld an effective secretary general. Deeply



familiar with medieval mystics like Meister Eckhart and Thomas à Kempis, Hammarskjöld was carrying a copy of the *Imitation of Christ* with him when he died.

Then there is the question of how Hammarskjöld died. Lipsey agrees with a British investigative journalist, Susan Williams, that the plane crash, which occurred during a mission to mediate civil war in the Congo, was an assassination rather than an accident. A combination of white supremacy, die-hard colonialism, cold war intrigue and corporate greed may have been responsible. If it is true that he was

murdered, then Hammarskjöld's striving to pattern himself after Christ was fulfilled even in the manner of his death. Lipsey strongly advocates a renewed official inquiry into the crash.

Hammarskjöld also read deeply in world religions, particularly Judaism and the spiritual writings of east and south Asia. He associated with the Jewish theologian Martin Buber. His mode was more that of a seeker than a confessor of God. However, Hammarskjöld usually found that what he valued the most about the various world religions was that they each endorsed the ethic of loving service to all humankind.

Lipsey does not neglect the outward record of Hammarskjöld's tenure at the United Nations. In particular, he covers three major issues in detail: Hammarskjöld's dealings with Communist China, his handling of the Suez Crisis of 1956 and the mediations in the Congo that led to his death. The great powers seem to have approved his nomination in the expectation that he was a colorless civil servant who would not challenge them. In each of these cases, they were proven wrong.

A sensitive dimension of the book is Lipsey's exploration of Hammarskjöld's sexuality. This was necessary because his vindictive predecessor as secretary general, Trygve Lie, operating in the vicious climate of international diplomacy during the McCarthy era, tried to discredit his successor-elect with American security forces by spreading rumors that Hammarskjöld was

sexually active with other men. Ironically, in a changed climate years later this episode became a pretext for gay rights groups to celebrate Hammarskjöld as one of their own. Lipsey, however, concludes that the

### ON THE WEB

The Catholic Book Club discusses a new biography of St. Francis.  
[americamagazine.org/cbc](http://americamagazine.org/cbc)

most important thing about Hammar skjöld's sexuality was that he personally chose celibacy after the pattern of the medieval monks he so admired, and convincingly observes that this choice was far more important than the question of any specific object of Hammar skjöld's desire. This chapter is a moving affirmation of voluntary celibacy, the more striking because it describes someone who never took a vow to live so.

Readers will also value the accounts of Hammar skjöld's upbringing in the Swedish university town of Uppsala, where he was early exposed to Scandinavian philosophical and theological creativity, and his embrace of the cultural and artistic life of New York City as secretary general. This aspect of the book is a valuable reflection on the implications for U.N. officials of living in the cultural capital of the United States.

Lipsey's account of the reception of *Markings* upon publication is one of his most interesting discussions. Well-

respected immediately in the United States, it was highly controversial in the secular culture of Hammar skjöld's native Sweden. The idea that a public official might have been a fervent Christian appalled many Swedish intellectuals, who denounced Hammar skjöld's quest to become like Christ as narcissism. This reaction, which Hammar skjöld perhaps anticipated when he delegated the decision for or against publication to a friend, may explain the greatest mystery to emerge from Lipsey's book. Why did Hammar skjöld not talk openly about his faith during his lifetime? It was this silence that made him least like the believer that Ignatius hoped would emerge from the Spiritual Exercises. Was it because he feared the opprobrium of his peers? This episode will provoke thought in an age that has become even more secular in the half century and more since Hammar skjöld died.

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shelter in Philadelphia's 30th Street train station, and although never convicted, she spent several nights in jail.

Was this welcome beginning calculated to challenge my objectivity as a reviewer? It did not, because within that opening paragraph I discovered something I had not known about Mary Scullion: she had spent time in jail! I realized from the start that in this book I would be introduced to legions of Mary Scullions in different communities. Inspired by separate foundresses and wearing different habits, the sisters would assess human needs and respond to them from a spiritual center of prayer and conviction.

This book chronicles the lives, triumphs and tragedies of thousands of women religious who began serving their church and its people in 1727, when the first band arrived in the New World. These progeny of monastic foremothers dating back to the fourth century were drawn by the love of God to pattern their lives on the example of Jesus.

Clergymen who came here from across the Atlantic often invited women religious they had known at home to serve with them. The welcome given to those who responded was uneven: some generous, much of it scandalous. Some communities arrived to find no one waiting to receive them, no suitable place for them to live, no furnishings and no provisions to sustain them. They would, nevertheless, take care of themselves and others through many dramatic moments in U.S. history, including the Civil War, the Gold Rush, the San Francisco earthquake, the influenza epidemic, the civil rights and women's movements and Hurricane Katrina. They would oppose the death penalty, comfort the victims of crime and endure investigations by the Vatican. McGuinness's book describes their enduring faith in the life they embraced.

CAMILLE D'ARIENZO

## FOUNDING SISTERS

### **CALLED TO SERVE** **A History of Nuns in America**

By Margaret M. McGuinness  
New York University Press. 277p \$35

Within moments of receiving Margaret M. McGuinness's comprehensive biography of religious life as a significant life form in the building of the United States, I knew reviewing it would pose a formidable task on several counts.

Because I had been a promoter of the magnificent multi-media exhibit, *Women & Spirit: Catholic Sisters in America*, by Helen Maher Garvey, B.V.M. (created in conjunction with the Leadership Conference of Women Religious) and because I had lived in a religious community myself for 62

years, I did not think there was much I could learn from Professor McGuinness.

Then, turning to the first sentence on the first page of this book, I discovered mention of one of my own Mercy sisters and personal heroines:

Sister Mary Scullion, R.S.M., a member of the Sisters of Mercy, began working with Philadelphia's homeless and mentally ill men and women in 1978 at the age of twenty-five.... As her ministry to this population grew into a lifetime commitment, Sister Mary was arrested at least twice for distributing food to those homeless seeking