

possibility of any syncretistic synthesis (p. 190). Merton's pioneer work in inter-faith dialogue is bearing rich fruit today, especially with the activities of the North American Board for East/ West Dialogue and the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue. Brother Ramon's chapter on "The Eastern Contemplative Traditions" is movingly complemented by his sections on "Taoist and Desert Father," elucidating the influence of these two traditions on Merton, and "Intellect and Intuition," which outlines Merton's fourfold agenda "for a renewed Christian contemplative life which embraces all that is best in all of the great spiritual traditions, earthed quite concretely in our common humanity" (pp. 215-219).

Brother Ramon's account of Merton's dynamic spiritual odyssey ends with Part V, which is comprised of his personal evaluation of Merton as an ongoing guide and friend. It is not only a recapitulation, but also an encomium to Merton as a monk, dedicated to monastic renewal, as a contemplative, as a spiritual director, as a prophet/ reformer, as an ecumenist, as a pioneer in East/ West dialogue, as a Christian, as a teacher, as an author, and as a human being. Merton, according to Ramon, never achieved the vocation of complete solitude, owing to his gregarious lifestyle, delight and ability in communication, and the compulsive nature of his writing (pp. 283ff.). Yet, he pointed the way to others, including the author, who has written this book to bear "witness to the wordless dimension of contemplation for all the people of God" (p. 310), and who fittingly ends with Merton's well known prayer which begins: "My Lord God, I have no idea where I am going. I do not see the road ahead of me . . ." (p. 311).

Terry Tastard

THE SPARK IN THE SOUL:

Four Mystics on Justice

London: Darton, Longman & Todd / Mahwah: Paulist Press, 1989

124 pages — £5.95 / \$7.95 paperback

Reviewed by **Stephen J. Hotchen**

When I began reading this short work by Terry Tastard (124 pages), I was curiously aware of a certain antagonism in part towards it. It was an

antagonism which grew out of the notion that I understood where I was "spiritually speaking," and was having that understanding called into doubt. As a result I found myself having to question a number of assumptions which had become programmed into my personal spirituality. Not least of these was the understanding that one's spirituality could lead one to something other than social action. This is not to say that my Christian faith was devoid of any involvement in what we might term "social action." It was more a neglect on my part to make the link between these two aspects of my life and faith.

There is, among very many Christians with whom I come into contact as a parish priest and I guess among Christians generally, a tendency to consider one's spirituality as something quite separate from the rest of one's life: after all, spirituality is concerned with God! More often than not it is likely to be guilt rather than our spirituality which prompts us into some kind of response to the needs of the world around us. We can look to things like the "Telethon" appeals for "Third World" disasters or the "Band Aid" appeals for evidence of this. Quite rightly, then, and almost at the very beginning of his first chapter, Terry Tastard draws us away from this motivation of guilt as an inducement to embark on any program of work for social justice and peace. He points us, with the help of St. Francis of Assisi, Meister Eckhart, Evelyn Underhill and Thomas Merton, towards what he calls a "Spirituality for Social Justice." I have to confess, however, to being a little ill at ease with this idea of a "spirituality for social justice." We find Tastard, at different places in his text, talking in terms of: 1) a spirituality of nonviolence; 2) a spirituality of resistance; or 3) a spirituality for social justice. It is almost as if a person could "tap in" to whichever spirituality takes his or her fancy and this, I believe, is where a serious flaw lies in an otherwise acceptable approach to this subject.

It is my understanding that all spirituality leads one towards a closer union with God, the Creator and redeemer of us all. How this closer union with God manifests itself in one's daily living will depend on the purpose to which each individual is being called by the Creator and their response to that call. In any case, I would want to insist that one could not respond to that call without engaging in the work of "social justice." A large part of my problem is founded in the use of the expression "social action." I want to know quite what is meant or understood by this expression. In an effort to answer this, I ask the question, "Is it possible to be a Christian without becoming involved in "social action?" My answer to that would have to be, "No!" My interpretation of "social action" is this: any action undertaken

on behalf of someone other than oneself. This means that there is a vast array of acts which qualify under this head — the act of offering prayers of intercession for someone, or the act of giving one's life for a specific cause. These are both to be understood as "Social Action" — and equally so. If this is how Terry Tastard is asking the reader to understand his expression "social action," then I am able to agree wholeheartedly with his thesis that spirituality is the appropriate initiator for such action. However, I have to confess to being left in some doubt as to whether this is actually his understanding of the phrase. This said I think we must in all charity give him the benefit of the doubt. Perhaps all I am drawing attention to here is a different way of expressing the same concept?

One of the greatest concerns for anyone reviewing a book must, I think, be the danger of missing the point. The more I write here, the more I worry that this may be the case. There are, of course, differing spiritualities, but is it not the case that their difference lies in method rather than aim? All this said, we have in this very readable book, four mystics drawn together, perhaps for the first time, in a quite refreshing way. Four individuals, each quite unique in their own way and yet who share a common foundation of withdrawal and detachment as the basis for their life and faith. The more I speak to people about the monastic or contemplative life, the more I become convinced that, generally speaking, it is viewed as a disassociation of oneself from the world. It is in this area that I find *Spark in the Soul* most helpful and edifying.

The popular image of St. Francis of Assisi is a man renowned for his kindness to animals and his withdrawal from the world. But this is to miss the thrust of his ministry and life. It is a mistake to understand Francis as simply fulfilling his personal aspirations, as far as his spiritual life is concerned, and little more. In this book we are shown how one's personal life and the corporate needs of God's people are indivisible. Francis becomes, not the simple, homely and slightly eccentric figure in a habit, but more a power for "social action" — such power being derived from a deep and balanced spiritual life in which the spiritual and the physical are integrated into a wholeness of life. The "spark in the soul" is a metaphor for the response which this wholeness of life dictates.

In Eckhart we are led towards detachment from an egocentric life. He teaches us not how to pray but how to live. Our lives become a continuing and deepening union with God. Eckhart also asks us to leave even our images of God behind. Detachment means that we are free actually to experience God as life itself. We cease to see God in a narrow,

individualistic context and are able to discover God, the imminent, transcendent and omnipotent Father of all Creation.

And so to the more contemporary of our four mystics. They appear, on the surface at least, to be very different. On the one hand, we have a Victorian housewife: a woman, married to a successful lawyer, of whom nothing more than running a household would have been expected. On the other hand, we have a man in holy orders living life according to a rule of silence (*not* a vow of silence as the text erroneously puts it) and bound by the many other strictures of a monastic community. Worlds apart and yet with a spirituality which was so very similar.

In an age when women had still truly to be emancipated, Evelyn Underhill spoke out for the underprivileged of her society and spoke out to great effect. This she did not out of a feeling of offended sensibilities but out of a deep and balanced spirituality which dictated how she must live her life. Part of that spiritually deepening process was a growing awareness and understanding of the political and social issues of her time.

For Thomas Merton, solitude and prayer were opportunities, not to withdraw from the world, but to bring that world which he carried in himself before God. Through his writing Merton was able to address very many of the social and political issues of his time, and did so with much success. Through his carrying of the world within himself, Merton was able to share in the deprivation of the blacks in America in the fifties and sixties. He was able to share in the horror of the Vietnam war. His comments which were given vent through his writing were, then, prompted out of this sharing and were the result, as was the case with the other three mystics, of a profound relationship with God at the very deepest of levels.

Something which has long been at the very heart of my own spirituality is the conviction that it is the spiritual which should be allowed to influence the physical, not the reverse as is so often the reality. It was with great relief, then, that I read *The Spark in the Soul*. Like a breath of fresh air in an otherwise polluted atmosphere we are shown, in the life and work of the four mystics chosen, the true foundation on which a Christian life should be built. It really is good to find a contemporary Anglican writing in praise of the virtues of a life of prayer and discipline.

In this book, Terry Tastard shows us that "social action" is not necessarily about frantic activity but has its root in something far more removed, detached, and withdrawn. Through a deepening spirituality we move ever nearer to the position outlined in the very first pages of his book. We are able to join with a Costa Rican woman who, talking to a friend,

points out what is for me a great truth of the Christian faith. She says, "How can you believe in Jesus Christ and let things stay as they are?" The spiritual truly must dictate to the physical.

FREEDOM IN EXILE:
The Autobiography of the Dalai Lama

New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1990
xiv, 288 pages — \$22.95 hardcover

Reviewed by **Roger Corless**

"INCARNATION SPEAKS OWN MIND" — so one might subtitle this book, to get a theologian's attention. Since there is, perhaps, some sort of structural similarity between the human form (Sanskrit: *nirmanakaya*; Tibetan: *tulku*) of a Bodhisattva in Mahayana Buddhism, and the incarnation of the Son of God in Christianity, the Christologist, long frustrated by lack of direct evidence in a desire to know what Christ really did and what he really thought of himself, might turn to the autobiography of a high Tibetan *tulku* with mingled excitement and apprehension. Will the deity prove himself? —or will he, as the rationalists claim, turn out to be merely human after all?

Well, His Holiness Tenzin Gyatso, Dalai Lama XIV, is pretty cagey. He does not explicitly deny his exalted titles, yet he calls himself "a simple monk" (p. xiii). At the same time, he has "no difficulty accepting [a] spiritual connect[ion] both to the thirteen previous Dalai Lamas, to Chenrezig, and to the Buddha himself" (p. 11). He considers himself so different in character from the Thirteenth Dalai Lama that "it is not possible" that he could be his reincarnation, but then, on discovering that he shares with him a great interest in *watches and rosaries* (sic!), he realizes that "of course I must be!" (p. 186). Is he serious? The ball is thrown back into our court.

As a child, he admits to being "extremely naughty" (p. 50), and indeed his actions are more like those of the mischievous Jesus of the apocryphal gospels than the silently maturing Christ of the Canon. Yet, as an adult, he is a celibate monk who spends "at the very least, five and a half