

Prayerful Encounter

Review of

*The Gethsemani Encounter:
A Dialogue on the Spiritual Life by Buddhist
and Christian Monastics*

Edited by Donald W. Mitchell and James Wiseman, OSB

Foreword by His Holiness, The Dalai Lama

Preface by Pierre François de Béthune, OSB

Introduction by Donald W. Mitchell and James Wiseman, OSB

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Reviewed by **Robert Grip**

July 22, 1996, began an extraordinary week in the history of the Abbey of Gethsemani. After three years of planning, Christian and Buddhist monks, nuns, and a select group of others traveled from all corners of the world to meet at the monastery that was home to Thomas Merton. The summary of that series of sessions, which included His Holiness, the Dalai Lama, can be found in *The Gethsemani Encounter*.

As described in the Introduction,

The encounter was seen as an opportunity to bring men and women together, for an extended period of time in a monastic setting, a small group of Buddhist and Christian monastics who are mature practitioners and teachers of spirituality. They would live, practice, celebrate together; and in that contemplative setting, they would dialogue about the practice of the spiritual life and its value for the world today.

This volume is a compilation of the ideas exchanged that week. The editors, Donald W. Mitchell and James Wiseman, OSB, did an outstanding job putting the sessions in context and balancing the presentations to complement each other.

Part One of the book, "Talks on the Spiritual Life," contains presentations intended for those with more than a passing interest in interfaith dialogue and monasticism. Of special note are the essays on "The Human Family" by Ven. Maha Ghosananda, which brings peacemaking to a challenging and practical level, "The Bodhisattva and Society" by The Dalai Lama, examining the role of Buddhism in modern society and the future, and "Lectio Divina" by Mary Margaret Funk, OSB, looking at the role of holy reading in the lives of monks and nuns.

Part Two, "Topics in the Spiritual Life," offers a chance to enjoy the depth of the conversation

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among the participants on such subjects as anger, love, humility, discernment, social action, and women's issues, among others. To this reviewer, it is the best part of the book. It contains the essence of the week, as it invites the reader to listen as the participants interact with each other, share thoughts, ask and answer questions of one another, and explore their common bonds. Any session that features The Dalai Lama, Basil Pennington, and Armand Veilleux is bound to be a fascinating one. The primary audience for this book will be those involved in an interfaith dialogue; however, the depth of thought will attract all interested in the contemplative life.

[Of special interest to readers of *The Merton Seasonal* is the last part of the book dealing with the tribute to Thomas Merton by The Dalai Lama and Abbot James Connor, formerly a monk of Gethsemani and a student of Merton, and currently Abbot of Assumption Abbey, Ava, Missouri. —Editor]