

questions rather than pat answers. Patterson states, "By writing your spiritual autobiography, hopefully you will clarify for yourself first of all exactly what you believe Perhaps you will also discover that what you actually believe and what you thought you believed are a little different, that difference coming to light only when you take the time to examine your beliefs" (p. 13).

Chapter five, "On Mysticism," for example, underscores the dual nature of spiritual exploration, and how this characteristic makes such an endeavor challenging if not intimidating. Patterson rightly notes that mysticism and mystical experiences can be both positive and negative, meaning that mysticism is not limited to a safe, intimate encounter with God. A mystical experience may also occur within a tragedy such as September 11, 2001, where horrifying wonder strikes, leaving those affected momentarily speechless and psychologically paralyzed. The point, however, is that we grow and develop spiritually as a result of such life experiences, assuming God's equal presence and availability.

Patterson, who is Catholic, writes from an ecumenical perspective, exploring religion as metaphor rather than dogma. He says the latter tends to complicate psychological and spiritual growth while the former encourages wonder and intrigue. Beyond family, friends, colleagues and acquaintances, Patterson's influences range from Thomas Merton, C.S. Lewis and Teilhard de Chardin to Zen Buddhism, Harold Kushner and Jewish mysticism to Viktor Frankl, Carl Jung and psychoanalysis. As a "self-help" book, *Writing Your Spiritual Autobiography* stands out due to its author's broad interests, influences and ecumenical spirit.

Glenn Crider

NOUWEN, Henri J.M., *Out of Solitude: Three Meditations on the Christian Life* (Notre Dame, IN: Ave Maria Press, 2004), pp.64. ISBN 0-87793-495-9. \$7.95.

FORD, Michael (ed.), *Eternal Seasons: A Liturgical Journey with Henri J.M. Nouwen* (Notre Dame, IN: Sorin Books, 2004), pp.190. ISBN 1-893732-77-0. \$18.95.

I am grateful for the opportunity to review these two recent publications from Henri Nouwen as it is unlikely that I would otherwise have picked them up. Not that I am unfamiliar with Nouwen's writings; that's the point, in a way I am too familiar

with him and perhaps feel that I have heard all he has to say. Also I am not predisposed towards books with soft-tone filtered pastoral scenes (*Out of Solitude*) or Van Gogh reproductions (*Eternal Seasons*) on the covers. It smacks of that artificial beauty and insincerity of certain self-help books that we all love to hate and whose market, I suspect, these two publications are aimed. Which is a pity because they're both better than that.

Out of Solitude is a re-release of a book published thirty years ago (it's a "30th Anniversary Edition") based on three sermons Nouwen gave at Yale University drawing on three moments in the life of Jesus: finding a lonely place to pray before dawn amidst a busy schedule (Mk 1:32-39); feeding the five thousand (Mk 6:32-44); and the part in the last supper where Jesus tells his disciples that in a short time they will see him no longer but then they will see him again (Jn 16:16-22). From these Nouwen focuses on solitude, care and expectation: the need to find a center of solitude and silence in one's life; how this can then lead to real care of those who suffer; and the need for such care to be fed by the expectation (hope) of an end to suffering. It is "classic Nouwen" and therefore nothing very startling—all very familiar, no surprises.

For all its familiarity (and despite the cover), I found *Out of Solitude* strangely edifying—perhaps *because* of its familiarity. I found myself being reminded of things I already knew and of how easily it is to lose sight of them, particularly in the first meditation on solitude—though the ending is a bit weak: "let us not forget to once in a while get up long before dawn to leave the house and go to a lonely place" (p. 30), to say nothing of the dreadful split-infinitive. In the second section on care I found his distinction between care and cure a bit forced and suspect it relates to specific negative experiences he himself had. Whilst valid it seems to have become a bit of a bee in the bonnet—as it does for Thomas Moore in his not particularly inspired foreword. The last section on expectation is perhaps the weakest. It comes across as commonplace and a bit labored, also very preachy—you can see that it started out as a sermon. It does however contain this gem concerning what he calls the paradox of expectation: "those who believe in tomorrow can better live today ... those who expect joy to come out of sadness can discover the beginnings of a new life in the center of the old ... those who look forward to the returning Lord can discover him already in their midst" (p.59). It also provides a much needed corrective to those who would simplistically

overemphasize living in the present moment or "the power of now."

It is not a book I would have bought, nor have even picked up, but one that I am glad to have become acquainted with. It is the sort of book that is ideal to give to someone who is getting baptized or confirmed, someone unfamiliar with Nouwen or who is searching for some "spiritual space" in their lives.

If *Out of Solitude* suffers from being over familiar this is far from true in the case of *Eternal Seasons* which I find to be a rich resource full of surprises. Michael Ford, an Anglican from Taunton in Somerset, England, has drawn widely from Nouwen's writings and skilfully crafted a book that is a work all of its own. Ford picks up on the prominence of time and season in Nouwen's work and uses it to produce a selection of readings that consciously follow the liturgical year. There are nine sections in all plus a very helpful introduction in which even the use of van Gogh for the cover makes perfect sense. Van Gogh, like Nouwen another Dutchman, was also acutely conscious of the passing seasons and sought to express this in his painting and re-painting of familiar landscapes in southern France.

The various sections include both a selection of readings for each season, Advent, Christmas, Epiphany etc. plus readings for the various feast days within each season. The book therefore becomes a rich resource both for individual devotions and for those putting together meditation series and celebrations for churches and groups. I particularly enjoyed Michael Ford's own introductions to each season which provide a helpful context for the selections that follow and somehow enhance them in a way that enables the reader to engage with them more meaningfully.

It has been a delight for me to re-engage with Henri Nouwen through *Eternal Seasons*. That which is familiar has been good to rediscover but there is much also that I have found fresh and new, or that has struck me in a new light, not least because of the way the readings have been selected and put together. Like precious stones, the setting and the arrangement seem to be as important as the beauty of the gems themselves. This is an anthology that I am pleased to recommend both for newcomers to Henri Nouwen and (even more so) to those (like me) who are familiar with him and think they have heard all he has to say.

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