

peace, could have been profiled instead. Discussing Latin and North American spirituality in the same chapter provides an interesting and unusual perspective on the latter, but following the discussion of liberation theology in the south immediately with consideration of various forms of feminism in the north provides a somewhat abrupt introduction to North American spirituality, which is accorded rather spotty treatment: the single spiritual "movement" to receive attention, the affective revivalist/Pentecostal tradition, might have been balanced by a look at the prophetic spirituality of Martin Luther King and the movement he led, or by the contemplative activism of Dorothy Day and the Catholic Worker, which would complement the discussion of Merton as well; and Canada might well have been represented by Jean Vanier and the L'Arche movement.

These comments merely indicate that it is unfortunate that Wiseman was not allowed another hundred pages – or more – to fill in some of the gaps that the present account unavoidably contains. No doubt he would have provided just as insightful a commentary on missing figures and traditions as he has on those he chose to include. But what *Spirituality and Mysticism: A Global View* does contain certainly rewards the reader with a perceptive and enlightening encounter with many of the ways in which the Christian life has been lived out in diverse ages and places. If it is not the only book to read on its topic, it is certainly one that should not be overlooked.

Patrick F. O'Connell

PIERCE, Brian J., *We Walk the Path Together: Learning from Thich Nhat Hahn & Meister Eckhart* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2005), pp. 202. ISBN 13:978-1-57075-613-9. \$18.00.

Thomas Merton and Thich Nhat Hahn met once, and then for only a few hours, yet in that brief meeting at Gethsemani Abbey in the spring of 1966 they established a deep spiritual connection. The young Vietnamese Buddhist monk had recently arrived in the United States at the invitation of the Fellowship of Reconciliation to speak against the war. He was at the time virtually unknown outside of his native country, yet so taken was Merton with him that he wrote a moving tribute entitled "Nhat Hahn Is My Brother" to introduce this monk to the American public.

Thich Nhat Hahn would need no such introduction today. Among Westerners, he is probably the best known Buddhist aside

from the Dalai Lama. An exile from his own country for nearly forty years, he has lectured and given retreats throughout the world, published over thirty books in English, and at the age of eighty continues to provide leadership to three Buddhist communities he helped to found—two in the United States and one in France. While still regarded as a leading advocate for peace, he is now better known for teaching a readily accessible form of contemplation called “mindfulness practice.” He also continues to engage in interfaith dialogue.

In *We Walk the Path Together*, Brian Pierce takes up the challenge of interfaith dialogue by bringing together in an imaginative and thoughtful way the teachings of Thich Nhat Hahn and the fourteenth-century Christian mystic Meister Eckhart (along with other Christian and Buddhist thinkers). For Pierce this dialogue is no mere academic exercise, but an integral part of his spiritual journey. Thich Nhat Hahn, or Thay as he prefers to call him, is not just one conversational partner among others, but his primary companion and guide on the journey. A Dominican friar by vocation, Fr. Brian has not only studied the writings of this Buddhist monk; he has adopted his principal form of spiritual practice. “What Thay has done with the practice of mindfulness,” he writes, “is to show us how every moment of life is a sacramental moment—a moment in time that unites us with eternity, with the ultimate dimension of life” (p. 73).

As a Christian, Pierce feels he has benefited enormously from the teachings of Buddhists like Thich Nhat Hahn and the Dalai Lama. He finds comparable expressions of spiritual truth in his own tradition, but nothing like the practical instruction which they provide. He notes especially the importance given to breath. “Through contemplative meditation and the practice of mindful breathing, we remain grounded in the present moment, in the presence of God, and are liberated from the shackles of fear” (p. 38). He has attended several Buddhist retreats, including one led by Thich Nhat Hahn at his Deer Park monastery in the winter of 2004. These experiences, he believes, have given him greater access to his own contemplative tradition, and in particular to the writings of Meister Eckhart, one of the most controversial members of his religious order.

Theologians of the Church have had difficulty knowing how to place Eckhart. His orthodoxy was seriously questioned during his lifetime, yet he was never condemned as a heretic. He was

regarded as a brilliant teacher and a charismatic preacher with a wide popular following, even though his paradoxical mode of expression often bordered on the incomprehensible. In our own time, he has perhaps received more attention from non-Christian scholars, such as D. T. Suzuki, than from Christian scholars—one reason being that he is regarded as a “mystic” and therefore beyond rational understanding. Drawing on his own contemplative experience and the teachings of Thich Nhat Hanh, Brian Pierce offers a valuable corrective. He shows how Eckhart, while remaining within the Christian tradition, is able to access a non-dualistic form of spirituality more commonly associated with Asian religions.

The language which Christians and Buddhists use to speak of Ultimate Reality is markedly different. Yet there are some striking similarities, especially among the mystics of these two traditions. Meister Eckhart and Thich Nhat Hanh make creative use of the symbols of their respective traditions to express the inexpressible mystery—the union of the human and the divine, the presence of the holy in the whole of creation, the fundamental interrelatedness of all beings. Brian Pierce is at his best in exploring the similarities and differences in their ways of expressing this mystery. While realizing that no language is fully adequate to represent what is ultimately beyond our comprehension, he is more than ready to learn from their attempts.

A prime instance is the chapter entitled “Mindfulness and the Eternal Now,” in which he brings Nhat Hanh’s signature approach to contemplative practice to bear on Eckhart’s characteristic theme of the immediacy of God. He compares a sign posted in the Buddhist’s retreat center in California, reading “The Kingdom of God is either now or never,” with the Christian mystic’s insistence that “There is but one Now.” Eternity for both men is not some distant prospect: it is a present reality fully available to us at any given moment. It is, moreover, a reality best found within oneself. “Whatever one’s spiritual path,” Pierce feels, the spiritual journey is a “journey home,” to the true self (p. 23).

His approach throughout the book is irenic—more drawn to similarities than differences. His style is perhaps too much inclined toward the homiletical and not sufficiently analytical, but his message is certainly timely. It is summed up in this statement: “Though our paths vary and the what or Who by which we name the ultimate dimension of reality is understood differently in the

various traditions, we all gain from listening to one another's music and sharing the fruits of one another's table" (p. 59). This viewpoint is much needed in the present day; it is one Thomas Merton would have endorsed.

Robert H. King

ROHR, Richard and Friends, *Contemplation in Action* (New York: Crossroad Publishing Company, 2006), pp. 157. ISBN 0-8245-2388-1 (paperback). \$14.95.

Ash Wednesday, about noon. An unseasonably cold morning surrenders finally to a pale sun and for a moment, the gray skies and earth and faces reflect the light. We stood together, residents and visitors, we North Americans, the "aliens," poised to step into the season of reflection leading to the light of the Resurrection. What expectation of transformation might Rosy, holding my right hand, have for the immense sorrow in her life? Her teenage son died six months ago in a flash flood in the neighboring colonia. Or Concha, on my left, who buried an infant daughter, only girl among sons? Both women work and live with their families on a reclaimed garbage dump outside the city of Juarez, Mexico. Both women, two among many, embraced us as sisters and brothers, offering a place at their table and a hand to walk, briefly, the path of their daily lives.

Contemplation in Action, a recent work authored by Franciscan Father Richard Rohr and friends, cites Micah 6:8 on the book's cover. The authors, Daniel Berrigan, Sr., Christine Schenk, Aaron Froehlich, Edwina Gately and Walter Wink, Paula D'Arcy and Thomas Keating among others, explore what it means to "act justly, love tenderly and walk humbly with God" in the course of their lives and work. Rohr speaks of the "second gaze" of compassion and a "third way" of seeing in the first two chapters. Others entitled "Eyes That See," "My Integration," "Thoughts on Psalm 23," "The Duty of Confrontation," "Who, Me Tired?" and "A Clandestine Christian" are eight of twenty-three richly diverse essays attesting to the collective range of personal experience and prophetic wisdom found in these pages.

Rohr's Center for Action and Contemplation in Albuquerque, New Mexico, supports a new reformation, from the inside, encouraging actions of justice rooted in prayer in the spirit of the gospels, with a new appreciation for, and cooperation with, other