

Book Reviews

Suzanne Zuercher, OSB, *Merton: An Enneagram Profile* (Notre Dame, Indiana, USA: Ave Maria Press 1996), pp.215, p/b, \$9.95, ISBN 0-87793-576-9.

Though the enneagram has been with us for centuries (some scholars suggest even going back to the Greeks by way of the Sufi mystics), it has really become popular during the past several decades of this century. Sister Suzanne Zuercher, a member of the Benedictine Sisters of Chicago and President of St. Scholastica Academy there, has had considerable experience in this field, having published several books on the subject of the enneagram: *Enneagram Spirituality* and *Enneagram Companions*, and now completes the trilogy with *Merton: An Enneagram Profile*.

In these earlier volumes the whole subject of the enneagram is described in great detail, but for one picking up the book on Merton without knowledge of the previous volumes, it could prove somewhat confusing to the uninitiated reader. My personal preference would have been an opening chapter on the enneagram in general, describing all 9 types, and then proceeding with Merton as type 4, the artist.

But that is a small criticism of an otherwise excellent book, which really helps explain a lot of Merton's personal history, especially his youthful writing with its strong confessional and autobiographical emphasis. I would like to recommend it to libraries as well as individuals who would find such a study helpful in their own spiritual journeys.

Divided into five parts, the author begins with "The Enneagram, the Spiritual Journey, and Thomas Merton," where Merton is typified as a 4 with its ego-romantic, ego-melancholic, over-dramatizer elements. The second part deals with "Instinct, Compulsion, and Gift: Vice and Virtue in the Life of Thomas Merton." Next comes "The Spiritual Geography of Thomas Merton" followed by "Relationship Brings Meaning: The People in Merton's Life." Merton's relations with both men and women are analysed. The author concludes with "Merton's Spiritual Message" which I found to be insightful and amazingly accurate.

Sr. Suzanne sees her work as open-ended in the sense that her reflections will be reviewed against Merton's personal journals now in the process of being published. She comments in her closing lines: "My previous books have ended with a reference to the ongoing nature of enneagram studies. This one will, too. The enneagram is a developing tradition we are all creating." (p.194) I think that sums it up very well.

Finally, a word of congratulations to the publishers for the attractive design for *Merton: An Enneagram Profile*, with its sensitive photographic portrait by John

Howard Griffin on the cover, and for managing to make it available in paperback at such a reasonable price.

Patrick Hart/Abbey of Gethsemani

Thich Nhat Hanh, *Living Buddha, Living Christ*, (London, Rider, 1996), pp.208, p/b, £10.99, ISBN 0-7120-7406-3

Thich Nhat Hanh will be known to Merton readers as the Vietnamese monk whom Merton called his brother. They met in the 1960s when both paid the price for speaking out unequivocally for peace. Thich Nhat Hanh has continued to pay that price as he is still *persona non grata* in his homeland. He now lives in Plum Village in France with a community which he has founded and nurtured in the ways of peace and inter-being. A remarkable aspect of the village is the attraction it has for American veterans of the Vietnam war who turn up looking for ways to find inner peace.

Thich Nhat Hanh is also a prolific writer and that is one of the weaknesses of *Living Buddha, Living Christ*. Much of it, especially the aspects of Buddhism, have been written about in similar fashion in many other works. However, there is throughout the chapters a parallel exploration of two of the world's great religious traditions. Thich Nhat Hanh does this with reflective insight though he is at his best when he provokes a real response. He recalls sharing in a eucharist with Dan Berrigan and how his account of this was received by a Buddhist and Christian audience with some shock. He related for his audience the story of the Indian Christian who suggested that exploring different traditions doesn't mean you are going to have fruit salad. Thich Nhat Hanh's immediate response was "Fruit salad can be delicious!" It is this quick witted response which so often masks a profound understanding and challenge to the way we would routinely debate about the nature of truth. The truly wise person will bring laughter to the most serious of subjects and then leave us feeling thoroughly disarmed.

There is a deeply moving passage in the book where Thich Nhat Hanh compares the death of the Vietnamese monk Thich Quang Duc to that of Christ. Quang Duc wrote loving letters to his family, his fellow monks and nuns, his government before burning himself alive in 1963 as a statement of peace. Thich Nhat Hanh describes this act as a compassionate one as it intended to "wake people up, restore understanding and compassion and save people." Just as Jesus allowed himself to be crucified so Quang Duc gave his life out of love for others.

Thich Nhat Hanh takes issue with John Paul II and challenges any Christian attempt at exclusiveness with the way and the truth arguing instead that there is more