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The Book Reviewer

ST. MARY'S PARISH LIBRARY AUGUST 2010

Catholic Means Universal by David Richo, Ph.D. (Church)

As David Richo says about his book, and about himself, he is "...recovering from the repression of his religious past, returning to the riches of our/his religion, and redesigning our/his religion to accommodate the advances of our contemporary world."

A formerly active priest, he is now a Jungian psychotherapist whose theology partners "Buddhist insights and the universal wisdom which is reflected again and again in Catholic teachings."

The reason that the author left the priesthood is not that he "lost" his faith, but that his

mature faith did not coincide with much that the institutional Church teaches. "Adult faith is fidelity to our own intuitive experience, and to the values and gifts of our religious past." As in his definition of the holy: "that profound sense that there is infinitely more to experience than we can explain."

Unlike many current authors who, in an effort to accommodate their early and immature faith to the new scientific discoveries, have thrown the baby out with the bath water, he retains a beautiful reverence for basic

Catholic theology: the Trinity; the divinity of Jesus; the Mass; and the meaning of Eucharist. He parts company with the Church in that it has only come belatedly to champion social justice and civil rights, and in that its so-called pro-life positions in practice can lead to social injustice.

The author criticizes the Church in exactly the manner in which Jesus criticized the leaders of his own Jewish religion, who kept the letter of the law, but abandoned its spirit.

Reviewed by Clare Dinno

My Life with the Saints by James Martin, S.J. (Saints)

James Martin's *My Life with the Saints* is much richer than simply a biographical collection of different saints. The reader is invited to follow along on Martin's personal spiritual journey. He shares his appreciation for the Saints and recounts the different ways and times they have entered and shaped his life. He manages to weave stories from his life into those of his favorite saints. Each saintly portrait is presented with the kind of loving detail that must only be the result of long hours in prayer and contemplation. Martin's approach is completely unique.

In the book, Martin relates how he discovered various "saints" and how each has

affected his life. He felt that the saints are like experienced travelers and they can guide you along the path of life. For instance, in the face of discouragement about sickness, you might take comfort in the admission of Therese of Lisieux that even she got discouraged. Martin cites how Thomas Merton influenced his decision to leave a corporate career for the priesthood. He relates how John XXIII taught him how to live chastely as a member of a religious order. Both Merton and Jesuit Pedro Arrupe served as models for obedience to religious superiors. When he worked with the marginalized, he remembered Mother Teresa, who believed that the poor remind

us that it is Christ that we are serving. He recounts how many of the saints faced disappointment, frustration, and anger with organized religion. He claims that he found this insight to be very helpful when confronted with the accusations and problems facing today's Catholic Church.

Martin believes that there are two traditional ways in which Christians have understood the saints: as companions and as patrons. The saints offer us encouragement and are models of what our lives could be. Benefiting from their insights is one reason to read the lives of the saints.

Reviewed by Pat Dalcher



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Life is Beautiful

Mariette in Ecstasy by Ron Hansen (Fiction)

The sisters of Our Lady of Sorrows live a quiet, orderly life of work, worship, and contemplation, surrounded by the beauty of God's natural world. Their longing for union with Christ informs their every act as they move through the set rhythm of their days.

Into this world of predictability and pattern comes seventeen-year-old Mariette Baptiste, who enters the convent as a postulant, fully ready to give herself to the Lord, body and soul. She is lovely to look at and the epitome of grace—in essence, everything that her sisters seek to be, and she unwittingly arouses admiration and even infatuation in some of her companions, but suspi-

cion and envy in others.

As the story cycles through liturgical years—chapters are often headed by the names of feast days—we observe Mariette, for whom a life of holiness appears to have come easily, passionately seeking the most profound unity possible with Christ, her attempts to humble herself becoming more and more extreme. When, at last, the sure sign of her oneness with Jesus appears for all to see, a rent occurs in the once seamless existence of the Sisters of the Crucifixion.

Ron Hansen's writing is spare and beautiful, often reading more like poetry than prose. He has constructed his

novel in a way that sets the stage in exquisite detail and then gently and gradually draws the reader into the life of the convent, fleshing out the characters and revealing abundance hidden in the simplicity of the sisters' daily routine of prayer and chores. As we observe Mariette's longing for and attainment of holiness, and her sister's opposing reactions to her "blessing", Hansen invites us to ponder our own hope for the miraculous and the doubt that accompanies its presence.

To read an excellent interview with Ron Hansen go to www.leaderu.com/marshall/mhr06/hansen1.html

Reviewed by Susan Triplett

The World of Teilhard de Chardin edited by Robert de Francour (Theology)

This is a collection of essays about Pierre Teilhard de Chardin by friends and colleagues who knew him, and many others who had become intrigued by his books, essays, and letters published after his death. Much of his strictly scientific work on paleontology and geology had already been published, but his speculative work—his "phenomenology" had been suppressed by the Vatican. Teilhard's root idea was that the process of evolution evident in the material world involves an ever-increasing complexity toward conscious-

ness. In *The Phenomenon of Man* he claims to have found the direction of evolution. This teleology, a directed goal in evolution, tends to irritate scientists and theologians alike: scientists, devoted to mechanistic ideas of chance encounters; and theologians suspicious of all evolutionary ideas about man which seem to counter the notion of original sin. Both camps are made nervous by Teilhard's fusion of scientific method with a deep faith in the Cosmic Christ.

Terms such as consciousness, love, essence, and meaning are dismissed by many

scientists as, if not nonsense, at least inexplicable and unworthy of much thought or attention. Teilhard's cosmology is neither science nor theology, and so is open to criticism from both sides. His world view is perhaps overly optimistic, given man's propensity to give in to his dark side, and the propensity of matter and energy to disintegrate into chaos. Yet, his love of all creation and his sense of wonderment continue to inspire both scientists and people of faith.

Reviewed by Clare Dinno