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The Book Reviewer

ST. MARY'S PARISH LIBRARY OCTOBER 2013

The Path of Centering Prayer by David Frenette (Prayer)

As a student and friend of Fr. Thomas Keating, and a longtime practitioner of centering prayer, David Frenette presents an encouraging and very practical picture of centering, and of its possible effects in our lives. Step by step, and very much like walking a labyrinth, we are led slowly and gracefully into a state of mind of "letting God, and letting be."

He develops the four ways of using this meditative prayer: with the sacred sym-

bol (word), the sacred breath, the sacred glance, and the sacred nothingness. The sacred nothingness is both the subject and the object of all prayer—God praying in us. On a topic that can be, and often is, covered in a pamphlet, this is a 200-page book that is never boring or repetitive.

"Learning in contemplative practice is subtle and experiential, like learning to float. You cannot really describe how to

float, just as you cannot really describe how to pray contemplatively."

Some excellent advice: keep it simple, and stop trying so hard.

"Actually, the sense that you have to achieve something, find some deeper depth, or go somewhere other than where you are, is an illusion."

That is the point: resting in God, who has always known exactly who we are.

Reviewed by Clare Dinno

Conjectures of a Guilty Bystander by Thomas Merton (Spirituality)

This book is a wondering and wandering journal, covering several decades of Thomas Merton's reading, the news of the day, and his life in the monastery. It is perhaps more honest and less contrived than some of his other writings. After all, he was expected to write about and to have an opinion about everything; and to understand and to explain all things. What a burden! Especially for one whose temperament tended toward a rather sour, cerebral, and sarcastic view of things. He corresponded with people from all over the world, of every possible shade of belief and unbelief. One woman wrote to him from France

that he must lead the western nations into a nuclear showdown with Russia. What a total misunderstanding of Christianity, of America, and of Merton!

He is at one point ecstatic over a particularly moving part of the liturgy; and immediately after, critical of his superiors for their fussy insistence about details of life in the monastery. In spite of an occasional heavy-handedness in his critique of both our American culture and of life in the monastery, there are many passages of great beauty which are inspired by his reading, the Kentucky landscape, and the liturgy, which compensates

for some of the sourness.

He is always aware of his own failures—especially failure of charity—and is willing to sacrifice his all too present self-awareness to an awareness of God. Not naturally humble, himself, he loves and appreciates the virtue of humility. His constant criticism that, "We are so obsessed with doing that we have no time for being." is countered by a quote from **The Cloud of Unknowing**: "In the perfectly humble, nothing is lacking in this life, physical or spiritual. For they have God, in whom is all abundance; and whoever has him needs nothing else in this life."

Reviewed by Clare Dinno



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Dear Heart, Come Home

The Confessions of St. Augustine

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The Healing of the Human Condition

DVDs:

The Keys of the Kingdom

The Vicar of Christ by Walter F. Murphy (Fiction)

This interesting novel reveals some intriguing and apparently factual insider knowledge about the U.S. military, the U.S. Supreme Court, and the Vatican. It is told in several voices and points of view by: a non-commissioned Marine officer, an elite Supreme Court judge, an Italian Cardinal, and a newspaper reporter. All of them are reporting on the astonishing career of one complex man, Declan Walsh.

After a childhood spent between Italy, Ireland, and Washington, D.C., Declan becomes a brilliant teacher of Constitutional law, with periods of wartime service as a reserve officer. As the C.O. of a large unit in the Korean War, Declan plans

and executes an arduous and lengthy withdrawal from an apparently hopeless situation, with all of his dead buried and accounted for and the wounded brought home. For this he receives the Medal of Honor and returns to teaching.

In an unlikely, but possible, chain of events, he is chosen to be the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court. He distinguishes himself with his usual brilliance, but he resigns after several years, after his gorgeous, alcoholic wife dies in an horrific car crash. He lives for two years as a Trappist Monk, until in another unlikely, but possible event, he is chosen by a deadlocked conclave at the Vatican to be

Pope.

With his usual éclat, Declan shakes things up at the Vatican. He chooses the name of Francesco (Francis I) and proceeds to astonish the clergy and the whole world with his emphasis on social justice and peace. One of his main picks to help implement his ideas is a Cardinal Martin, who had been the Archbishop of Buenos Aires! This book was published in 1985, and deals with many issues which were muted thirty years ago, but are front and center in religious and government circles today. The last 200-page section is a real page turner—so enjoy!

Reviewed by Clare Dinno

Between Heaven and Mirth by James Martin, S. J. (Spirituality)

James Martin is always enjoyable to read, because even when he is writing about God and religion, which is what he is always writing about, his joyous nature bubbles up irrepressibly. In this book there is no need to suppress the joy; the subject matter is about the joy we feel, or ought to feel, when we have found a real relationship with God. If there is no joy in our relig-

ion, or in our understanding of God, then we haven't really found him.

Fr. Martin quotes St. Teresa of Avila, who is supposed to have said, "God save us from a sad saint" and "A sad nun is a bad nun" along with other pithy remarks from saints whose relationship with God was always joyful. St. Paul, who is sometimes seen as being dour and repressive

(wrongly, I believe) has told us "to rejoice always." From that beautiful message, we have Rejoicing (Gaudete) Sunday in the middle of Advent, a penitential season. The Puritans, the Inquisition, and the Jansenists were messengers of gloom and doom, but most Christians have found the message of love and forgiveness to be a source of joy.

Reviewed by Clare Dinno

Absolute Relativism by Chris Stefanick (Philosophy)

This slim volume deals with the sea in which modern people swim—a pervasive relativism which denies ultimate truth and the existence of objective right and wrong. Stefanick's question and answer format allows readers to systematically learn about the relativism

that underlies most moral discussions these days, and gradually leads to an understanding of the fallacy of this approach.

He discusses the idea that what was once recognized as disagreement is now considered to be intolerance, which effectively stymies

thoughtful discourse about crucially important issues of our day.

Since the author usually speaks with teens and young adults in his outreach, the book is written in clear language which will engage adults of any age.

Reviewed by Susan Triplett