

BOOK REVIEW

Spirituality and Mysticism: A Global View. By James A. Wiseman. New York: Maryknoll, Orbis Books, 2006. 242pp.

Globalization is a reality that has profoundly changed our world. John Paul II once stated, "Globalization, a priori, is neither good nor bad. It will be what people make of it."¹ Accordingly, globalization and its consequences will be shaped by human choice and action. The negative side of globalization has cast its shadows through a deteriorating effect on the environment and an alarming persistence of poverty in various nations of the world. It also sets off an era of cultural and religious warfare, not only through the battlefields, but also through the media and economics. Yet on the positive side, it can enable us to break down cultural, ethnic, and religious barriers and brings us into increased human understanding and solidarity.

To provide guidance for students of spirituality, who live in a society of religious pluralism in this age of globalization, James A. Wiseman wrote the book "Spirituality and Mysticism: A Global View" with attention to the global context in which the study of Christian spirituality is done. He refers globalization to its positive sense which is "a growing sense of interconnectedness among all peoples and nations on earth, facilitated by rapid means of communication that promote a sharing of ideas and a broadening of intellectual and emotional horizons."² Even though the focus of the book is specifically on Christian spirituality, Wiseman also wants to "offer examples of how some have done the dialogue with persons of other persuasion."³ As a result he repeatedly presents the pieces of history that show Christianity, since the beginning, has had a continuing history of living "in peace with their religiously diverse neighbors."⁴

This relatively short and readable book has ten chapters. The first chapter is a fine treatment of the various issues concerning the definition of terms, Christian spirituality and mysticism. Particularly informative is Wiseman's presentation of a theological methodology, inspired by Lonergan, for interpreting and understanding the subject of spirituality.

The second chapter is a sketchy outline of the spirituality of the biblical authors and the different forms of exegesis, which have been foundational in guiding understanding and explaining spiritualities. Wiseman's attempt to cover a colossal amount of material in one chapter however seems to be problematic. Yet, he shows his genius in employing the biblical story of Abraham as a lens through which the history of biblical spirituality is examined. Besides, he adopts David Tracy's schema dividing biblical interpretation into three paradigms: pre-modern, modern, and post-modern. As a result he appropriately recognizes the contributions of feminist biblical scholars, such as Elisabeth Schussler Fiorenza, and at the same time he sensibly includes the poignant works of Elie Wiesel in the long tradition of biblical interpretation.

In chapters three through seven, Wiseman presents a superb synopsis of the history of Christian spirituality from the early beginning of Christian martyrs, through patristic era, to the medieval age. Not only the most important and familiar figures in Christian spirituality's history such as Clement of Alexandria, Origen, Anthony of Egypt, Augustine of Hippo, Gregory of Nyssa or Thomas Aquinas are presented but influential figures in the East like Ephraim the Syrian, Gregory Palamas, Nicephorus and, most interestingly, important women, such as Perpetua, Felicity, Macrina, Synclitica (a desert mother), and Frankish woman Dhuoda are included as well.

Writing a short book with so much material to cover, Wiseman creatively pairs the historical figures with contemporary ones. Thus Lutheran spirituality is treated through the writings of both Luther and Martin Dietrich Bonhoeffer; Ignatian spirituality is discussed through the writings of Ignatius of Loyola and Karl Rahner; similarly the Book of Common Prayer is

considered with Evelyn Underhill's works. Accordingly history of spirituality of several centuries is greatly compressed; at the same time, Wiseman is able to demonstrate a continuing influence of a school of spirituality.

In the last three chapters Wiseman explores recent Christian spiritualities in Asia, Africa, and the Americas. Instead of examining an Asian spirituality in general, he focuses specifically on Indian, Japanese, and Filipino figures. In consideration of African spirituality, Wiseman's focus is thematic: liturgical inculturations, social justice, and the current rise of the independent churches which represents a wide range of Christian spirituality at work on Africa continent. In the final chapter of the book examining the spiritualities throughout the Americas, Wiseman focuses on liberation theology through the writings of Gustavo Gutiérrez; on feminist spirituality through the works of Sandra Schneiders, Jacquelyn Grant, and Ada María-Díaz; on Pentecostal through the writings of Jonathan Edwards'; on contemplative spirituality through those of Thomas Merton.

Reading the book, one can't help but agree with Peter C. Phan that "Within the narrow space allotted to his book, he [Wiseman] deftly helps us not only to take a penetrating look at the Catholic, Protestant, Anglican, and Pentecostal spiritual and mystical traditions but also to extend our horizon to include Asia, Africa, and the Americas."⁵ Unfortunately, the book's greatest strength is also its most conspicuous limitation: so much material and so little space. Nonetheless, Wiseman sensibly adds to each chapter stimulating discussion questions and helpful bibliographies for the students who wish to go deeper into the subject.

At the beginning of the book, Wiseman warns that "some readers will lament the absence of one or more of their favorites" because "Rather than attempting to say just a bit about a great many persons and movements, I have gone into somewhat greater detail about a few of them."⁶ Given that Wiseman "had to be extremely selective,"⁷ one still wonders if liberation spirituality in Latin America would be better demonstrated by a heroic example of the struggles of the many Christian martyrs such as Archbishop Oscar Romero. Furthermore, those who are aware of the work of the three volumes of *Asian Christian Theologies*⁸ will certainly question the choice of Shusaku Endo, Kazoh Kitamori, or Mary John Mananzan over other writers of contextual theologies such as feminist, dalit, minjung, tribal/indigenous, minority resistance theologies which represent the rich tradition of Christian spirituality emerged from multi-religious contexts in Asia.

After all, despite its limitations of perspective on South America and Asia, the book is a great accomplishment in informing students of spirituality about the richness and variety of the world's Christian spiritualities. It is an innovative atlas of the history of the Christian spirituality which is a useful guide to seeing Christian spirituality from global perspective. It definitely makes a wonderful contribution to Orbis Books 's "Theology in Global Perspective" series.

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Endnotes

¹ John Paul II, "Address to the Pontifical Academy of Sciences" (April 27, 2001) no. 2, taken from the Vatican Web site.

² James A. Wiseman, *Spirituality and Mysticism: A Global View* (New York: Maryknoll, Orbis Books, 2006), xi.

³ Ibid. 19.

⁴ Ibid. 45.

⁵ Peter C. Phan, "Foreword," in James A. Wiseman, *Spirituality and Mysticism: A Global View*, ix.

⁶ James A. Wiseman, *Spirituality and Mysticism: A Global View*, xii.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ John C. England et al. (eds.), *Asian Christian Theologies: A Research Guide to Authors, Movements, Sources* (New York: Maryknoll, Orbis Books, 2004 & 2005).