

## Insights on St. Francis, world faiths, poetry and laughter

Diane Scharper | Jul. 25, 2012

### DATING GOD: LIVE AND LOVE IN THE WAY OF ST. FRANCIS

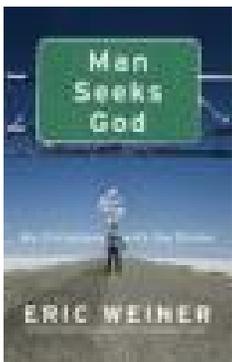
By Daniel P. Horan, OFM

Published by St. Anthony Messenger Press, \$14.99

Franciscan Fr. Daniel P. Horan offers a philosophical meditation on the teachings of St. Francis Assisi. From Francis' love for the Gospels to his efforts to rebuild the church, Horan probes the mystical connection that the saint experienced with God.

Although the book focuses on Francis, it includes references to the writings of St. Bonaventure, Thomas Merton, Mother Teresa of Calcutta and others.

A professor of religious studies at Siena College, a friar and a blogger, Horan is an expert on Franciscan spirituality. In an attempt to make Francis' message clear and palatable to both adults and young adults, Horan sprinkles his text with teenage lingo. The book at times takes on a kind of jarring tone. Horan, for example, equates Francis' intense spiritual feelings with emotions one might experience when going out on a date. Although the writing style can be off-putting, the book redeems itself with profound spiritual insights.



### MAN SEEKS GOD: MY FLIRTATIONS WITH THE DIVINE

By Eric Weiner

Published by Twelve, \$26.99

A former foreign correspondent for National Public Radio, Eric Weiner has visited 30 or so countries, including India, Japan and Israel. His first book, *The Geography of Bliss* (2008), was a best-selling travelogue. His second, *Man Seeks God: My Flirtations with the Divine*, is also a sort of travelogue.

He doesn't so much check the countryside and sample the cuisine as much as study the spiritual life. He visits eight countries and examines their religious beliefs -- including Judaism, Shamanism, Buddhism, Catholicism and Taoism. Immersing himself in the culture of these faiths, he tries to ascribe various characteristics to God -- such as God is love (as seen in Sufism).

Considering himself an agnostic and a searcher, Weiner learns that religious people aren't necessarily

ignorant -- even though he had perceived them as such. Nor are they blissful. Like Weiner, they are often depressed and plagued by doubt. Yet in spite of their circumstances, they are among the world's happiest people. Why? Ever the traveler, Weiner suggests that happiness lies in the journey itself as opposed to the destination.



#### AFTER SILENCE: SELECTED POEMS OF SISTER MAURA EICHNER, SSND

By Maura Eichner

Published by Notre Dame of Maryland University, \$30

Poetry is a pipeline to God. According to *After Silence*, a posthumous selection of poetry by School Sister of Notre Dame Maura Eichner, that pipeline works in several ways. It allows the poet to connect to and find words for experience. Those words, in turn, connect readers to the poem, which then reveals a shared humanity and in so doing brings a kind of grace.

Eichner (1915-2009) was a professor of English at the College of Notre Dame of Maryland -- now Notre Dame of Maryland University -- from 1943 until her retirement in 1992. She published 10 books of poetry and wrote numerous articles for newspapers and other publications. She was also a demanding and award-winning teacher. A School Sister of Notre Dame for 75 years, she did not appreciate phony religious sentiments, nor did she inject them into her writing.

Her poetry examines relationships (warts and all); it looks at family, friends, poets, students, dogs and teaching. Although she wrote some free verse, she writes mostly in classical forms including the quatrain, villanelle, sonnet and sestina. She sometimes wrote poems from the perspective of other writers, such as John Berryman. Her poem "Dream Songs Concluded," about Berryman's suicide, is one of several stunning poems in this collection.

She insisted that her students write clear-eyed prose and poetry about ordinary circumstances, rightfully believing that if one wrote well enough, an inherent gracefulness would shine through. (Full disclosure: I was one of her students.)



#### BETWEEN HEAVEN AND MIRTH: WHY JOY, HUMOR, AND LAUGHTER ARE AT

THE HEART OF THE SPIRITUAL LIFE

By James Martin, SJ

Published by Harper One, \$25.99

Holy people are joyful because holiness brings people close to God, who is the source of all joy. That's the point of Jesuit Fr. James Martin's latest book. Author of *The Jesuit Guide to Almost Everything*, commentator for *The New York Times*, and contributing editor to *America* magazine, Martin argues that faith is the road to joy.

Forget the historic grimness of American religion, he says, especially as found in the sermons of Jonathan Edwards and his ilk. Martin even adds a few jokes as he looks at incidents from his own past, the lives of the saints, and those of spiritual masters from various religious traditions.

Even though many religions seem more concerned with sin than virtue, Martin believes that joy, humor and laughter are part of a healthy spiritual life. Numerous saints, including St. Thomas Aquinas, pointed out the need for playfulness. Ultimately, this delightful little book with its lighthearted tone exemplifies what it preaches: that God is not a joyless judge. Nor is religious conviction synonymous with being a grouch.

[Diane Scharper is the author of *Radiant, Prayer Poems*. She teaches English at Towson University in Maryland.]

**Support independent reporting on important issues.**



---

**Source URL (retrieved on 07/27/2017 - 07:56):** <https://www.ncronline.org/books/2017/07/insights-st-francis-world-faiths-poetry-and-laughter>

**Links:**

[1] <https://www.ncronline.org/donate?clickSource=article-end>