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From a Monastery Kitchen (Book Review)

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Book Reviews

From a Monastery Kitchen. Brother Victor-Antoine D'Avila-Latourrette. San Francisco: Harper and Row Publishers, 1989, 128 pp. Reviewed by Arnold Koekkoek, Associate Professor of History.

This delightful book will dispel any notion you might have had—if, indeed, you ever thought about the matter—that a monastic diet meant bread, water, and oatmeal, with a few vegetables and perhaps an occasional piece of fish thrown in. Brother Victor is a monk and cook at a priory in the state of New York, and his collection shows that some modern monks, at least, eat quality meals. From soups to salads to main dishes to desserts, this volume focuses on healthful, natural foods, simple but definitely not plain or dull. In keeping with the Benedictine prescription, there are no meat recipes, but there are a number of recipes for fish and for crops harvested from the monastery gardens. On the last few pages are basic recipes for sauces, pastries, and spice mixtures that can be used by any

cook, whether the rest of the book is used for cooking or just read for pleasure.

The recipes appeal to the taste buds; any number of them made me want to rush out and try them at once. But there is much more, for the book appeals to the eye as well. On each page a medieval wood cut illustration is featured, along with poetry and quotations, all of which enhance the monastic mood. One not only learns about good food, but one can learn something about monasticism as well.

In every way Brother Victor's book is a pleasure to read, and I anticipate its practical value in our kitchen as well. If you like good food, if you want a different slant on monasticism, if you enjoy a beautiful book, I recommend *From a Monastery Kitchen*. I couldn't put it down.

Buddhism: The Path to Nirvana. Robert C. Lester, Religious Traditions of the World Series. San Francisco: Harper & Row, Publishers, Inc., 1987. 160 pages. \$7.95. Reviewed by Anne C. Kwantes, visiting instructor in history/theology.

Robert C. Lester, professor in the religious studies department of the University of Colorado at Boulder, presents his readers with a detailed, yet clear, exposition of Buddhism. Claiming that both the philosophical and mystical aspects of Buddhism have appeal for contemporary Americans (143), Lester weaves the themes of monasticism and meditation throughout this exposition.

It has been estimated that some five hundred thousand Americans, most of them of non-Asian descent, profess to be Buddhists (140); the purpose of this work is one of helping its readers to understand living Buddhism (17). This volume ably serves as an introduction to the complex Buddhist religious movement. Covering more than two thousand years, and several Asian countries, the author systematically explains the tenets and history of various strains of Buddhism.

In an introduction of a mere seven pages he covers central Buddhist concepts. The next two chapters

relate the historical growth and the spread of Buddhism, and deal with Buddhist thought and practices in greater detail. As the author discusses the Buddhist system of beliefs and practices, he reminds us repeatedly that Theravada Buddhism, with its emphasis on self-discipline, is intimately related to Mahayana Buddhism, which stresses compassion.

Chapter 4 concerns the dynamics of the Buddhist life. It portrays in great detail how Theravada Buddhism is practiced in a village of Thailand and portrays the delicate balance of the "making" of merit by monks and the "sharing" of merit by the laity. We see then how Mahayana Buddhists, here represented by Zen monks in Japan, seek enlightenment through meditation. The author then briefly reviews the major experiences of Buddhism in Asia, and notes how certain Buddhist teachings have come to America.

In his concluding reflections Lester discusses the inclusivity of Buddhism, and its dual focus on self-