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Robert G. Waldron. *Thomas Merton in Search of His Soul: A Jungian Perspective*. Notre Dame, Indiana: Ave Maria Press, 1994. 157 pages. \$7.95.

Reviewed by Joann Wolski Conn

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Robert G. Waldron, whose master's degrees are in English and education, was inspired by years of reading Merton and Jung to view Merton's life as identical to Jung's paradigm of individuation (9). His book uses Jung's analytical psychology to explain the phases of Merton's interior journey.

Waldron's "Jungian Commentary" (9) on Merton's life begins by interpreting Merton's life up to his late thirties as an encounter with his shadow. Whereas Jung defines shadow generically as those aspects of ourselves we would rather not face, Waldron uses this term primarily as synonymous with evil or sin (23) and views Merton's father's death as a wounding of the personality that initiated Merton's entry upon the inner journey to his center, his Self, in which Merton was revolted by what he saw within. Waldron not only identifies Merton's inner journey with Jung's psychological paradigm of individuation but also identifies Merton's faith-journey during this period with Jung's religious vocabulary and assumptions. For example, Waldron judges that "Merton would eventually realize that the ego is not the center of the psyche but the Self which is the Christ, a realization that would lead him into the Catholic church" (35). That is, Merton's conversion to Catholicism is interpreted as manifestation of his inward face, which Jung calls the anima, "the eternal image of the woman . . . an imprint or archetype of all the ancestral experiences of the female, a deposit . . . of all the impressions ever made by woman" (53). According to Waldron, Merton's conversion meant "He had finally found a worthy recipient for his anima projection, Holy Mother Church. . . . His conversion solved his anima problem by finding a bride in the church and by temporarily silencing his shadow" (59). Waldron mentions no other source for this conversion; there is not even an allusion to transcendent grace beyond the psyche. This is one example of the way Waldron consistently adopts one position in an ongoing scholarly debate about Jung's view of Christianity without ever acknowledging that there is a debate or why he prefers the position that he adopts

within the debate. I will return to this controversy later.

Merton's struggles in the time between entering Gethsemani (1941) and the early 1950s are seen in terms of a "false self and true self," terms that occur both in Merton and Jung. Waldron assumes that Merton's explanation of a "false self" (*Waters of Siloe*, 349), or the ego that we tend to worship in place of God, corresponds exactly to Jung's belief that in the first stages of individuation the ego considers itself the center of the psyche rather than the Self, which Jung claims is the God within (72). *The Sign of Jonas* reveals Merton beginning to face and accept his shadow, thus opening the way for integration of "the masterpiece of individuation," his anima, which is the theme of Waldron's second part.

A transitional chapter on "Fire Watch" (Epilogue to *The Sign of Jonas*) aims to be a summary of Merton's first phase of individuation. Here Waldron uses Merton to explain Jung's paradigm at least as much as he uses Jung to explain Merton.

Part Two describes Merton's encounter with his anima. This confrontation, according to Waldron, resulted in two events: the "Louisville Vision" and the creation of the prose poem *Hagia Sophia* (97). Waldron links the former event directly to a dream recorded a month earlier in which Merton sees a girl named Proverb (his anima). Merton's Louisville Vision, in which he embraces the human race, "is certainly the result of Merton's embrace of the feminine component of his own personality symbolized in his Proverb dream" (103). The second event is Merton's emotional response to Victor Hammer's painting of a woman crowning a young man. Merton, unconsciously recognizing in these images his own encounter with his anima (106), creates the prose poem *Hagia Sophia*. Waldron interprets it by completely identifying Merton's words "Sister" and "Hagia Sophia" with Jung's term anima, claiming "The Sister (from now on referred to as Anima) is Merton's anima who rises from the depths of the unconscious . . ." (107). "Hagia Sophia is Anima. Anima is Holy Wisdom who invites Merton and all men . . . to live" (108). Waldron explicates Merton's romantic involvement with a nurse, whom the biographer Mott calls S., as Merton's projection of his anima onto a woman (114), and notes that psychically it was probably the best thing that could have happened to him. Why was it best? According to Waldron, because Mary, the Mother of God, is theoretically the only acceptable recipient of all Cistercian monks' anima projections but cannot be the recipient of instinctual longings for all celibate monks (115). This ineffectiveness helps

us "understand why so many men fail to take final vows as monks" (115). Waldron's response to this insufficiency is approval of monks' "contact with women who will assist them in getting in touch with the feminine within themselves. Permitting retreats for women at Gethsemani, as is now done, was a bold but wise decision" (115).

The book concludes with a chapter titled "Merton and Jung: Contrasts and Parallels" in which Waldron juxtaposes quotes from each man without context or comment. Again, this reveals Waldron's assumption that the identification between Merton and Jung is self-evident.

For this reviewer, two problems pervade Waldron's book. One is Waldron's uncritical reading of Jung's notion of anima. Most problematic, however, is Waldron's use of Jung's psychology to explain Merton's individuation without giving any critical attention to Jung's assumptions about Christianity. My objection cannot be met by the reply that Waldron's aim is psychological, therefore he need not deal with theological issues. The crux of the matter is whether Waldron can fairly claim Merton's life is identical to Jung's paradigm of individuation (9) without acknowledging how individuation is intrinsically related to Jung's view of Christianity, and at least note the fact that there is a serious debate about the difference between Jung and traditional Christianity. Moreover, in a book that claims Merton's and Jung's search is the same (14), I believe the author owes his readers an explanation of this debate and supporting reasons for his stance in this controversy.

Waldron's position is evident in the way he immediately substitutes anima for Wisdom in his quotations from "Hagia Sophia" and his lack of even the slightest attention to the fact that in Christian tradition Wisdom is a complex symbol associated with Mary and with female characteristics of God. To interpret Merton's poem simply as a meditation upon his anima is to assume the adequacy of the position in the Jung-and-Christianity controversy which claims that all words about Christian experience are and remain completely psychological and that faith does not refer to radical self-transcendence. (On the debate and this position, see Murray Stein, "C. G. Jung, Psychologist and Theologian," in R. L. Moore and D. J. Meckel, eds. *Jung and Christianity in Dialogue* [New York: Paulist, 1990], especially Stein's references to Robert Doran, *Subject and Psyche: Ricoeur, Jung, and the Search for Foundations* [Lanham, MD: University Press of America,

1977]). By interpreting Merton's Christian conversion simply as a projection of his anima (59), I believe Waldron exemplifies his assumption of the adequacy of the view that Jung's psychology is simply a restatement in psychological terms of the principal tenets of Christian faith. Waldron emphasizes how Jung, "raised in a Christian family . . . understood the intrinsic value of religion . . . [and] incorporates religion [in his analytic psychology]" (14). Waldron pays no attention either to the massive evidence which supports Jung's lifelong struggle to repudiate Christianity's oppressive claims on his life, or to the ways in which Jung's interpretation of Christianity was very different from Christianity's own self-interpretation, an interpretation which was central to Merton's own identity as a Christian monk. (See Peter Homans, "C. G. Jung: Christian or Post-Christian Psychologist?" in *Jung and Christianity in Dialogue*: 21-37, especially 23-24.)

A second problem is Waldron's assuming the adequacy of a standard, uncritical reading of Jung's notion of anima. For Waldron, following Jung, "the feminine" is a projection within male ego development without reference to this image's social conditioning. In this view, a male's psychic development is promoted by being able to project his anima onto a worthy object. Recall that Waldron interprets Merton's conversion to Holy Mother Church as just such a projection and temporary "solving of his anima problem" (59). There is no mention of grace or the work of God's Spirit in this conversion. The Church becomes "useful" insofar as She serves to receive this man's anima. Even more problematic, I believe, is Waldron's view of monks' need to associate with women. This contact, he remarks, will enable these men to get in touch with the feminine in themselves (115). That is, women will serve men's development. There is no mention of women's own gifts seen, for example, in the contribution of contemplative women, who have been invited to give conferences to the monks of Gethsemani. Like Jung, Waldron demonstrates a very underdeveloped awareness of actual women beyond their ability to serve men's needs. This is a clear example of why feminists find Jung so problematic (see, for example, Naomi R. Goldenberg, "A Feminist Critique of Jung," *Signs*, 2/2 [1976] 443-49).

In short, this book so oversimplifies both Jung and Merton that I believe it offers no significant contribution to understanding Merton or spiritual development.