

with Lax that closes the volume, providing striking insights both on the Merton-Lax relationship and about a poet who is increasingly recognized as a major literary figure in his own right, and who certainly comes across in this conversation as an icon of wisdom, a truly admirable human being. Biddle notes that the 20 pages of interview are a condensation and synthesis of over 100 single-spaced pages of transcript from talks over a number of days in 1992 and again in 1998—what is provided can only leave readers with the desire that the entire set of interviews might one day become available.

At the end of the published interview, Lax says of Merton's death, 'I certainly felt as though I'd lost a correspondent. It wasn't that I'd lost a friend because I don't feel that now either. He's there in that sense, the friend is there. But as a correspondent he's hard to get to' (p. 440). For Lax, the correspondent is no longer hard to get to, and because of Bill Biddle's devoted work, both correspondents are no longer hard to get to for readers of *When Prophecy Still Had a Voice*. The title is taken from a 25 November 1957 letter from Merton to Lax, then back in Olean, advising him to 'Visit all the haunts, stamp in all the snows, pause beneath all the trees & drive back & forth to Bradford as in the days of old when prophecy still had a voice' (p. 139). On the evidence of these letters, prophecy continued, at least intermittently, to have a voice, in fact two voices, as long as the friends sent their love and wisdom and puzzlement at the world and its ways back and forth to one another—although, like all authentic prophecy, it is not always easy to grasp on a first reading!

Patrick F. O'Connell

MERTON, Thomas, *Thomas Merton: Writings Selected With an Introduction by Christine M. Bochen* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2000), pp. 144. ISBN 1-57075-331-8 (paperback). \$14.00.

One of the most enduring aspects of Thomas Merton's character lies in his ability to stir deep empathy in very different personalities. Merton is contemplative to the mystic, prophet to the people of the covenant, activist and reformer to those who seek justice. So it is, perhaps, unsurprising that different lenses and different perspectives produce differing views of Merton. Christine Bochen is candid about the Merton she presents in *Thomas Merton: Essential Writings*. Comparing her approach to William Shannon's, she notes how the introductions to each chapter 'show how Merton's social concerns unfold and fit into his life and work'. Bochen quotes Shannon's prescription for the Christian life, a process of 'awakening to the reality of God within, living with love and justice, and recognizing and sustaining all that unites the human community' (p. 32). She frames Merton's life and work through Shannon's three dimensions of Christian life.

The first group of selections, 'A Call to Contemplation', includes passages early and late in Merton's writing. From a letter to Sr Therese Lentfoehr in 1949 to the 1968 essay 'Creative Silence', the drumbeat of the call to prayer rings consistently in these works. But Bochen begins with the assumption that 'few who read Merton embrace the contemplative life with the intensity possible for monks and hermits' (p. 51). Bochen may underestimate many of Merton's most devoted readers, and since the majority of her selections are pulled from his later life, even this opening

call to contemplation is weighted toward the social dimensions of his later work. Those intent on the interior journey may not find enough of Merton's exquisite writings on the interior life to satisfy their unending thirst.

Still, that very aspect is one of the strengths of Bochen's work. For Bochen has written a text that is accessible to those for whom interiority is less inviting, a population that includes many young adults and those primarily interested in the implications of Merton's work for social justice. The second group of selections, 'A Call to Compassion', focuses directly on his social thought as he examines the committed Christian's response to the Holocaust, the anti-war movement, racism and colonialism. Beginning with the well-known 1958 epiphany in Louisville, Bochen charts a course through Merton's transforming vision, his developing sense of personal mission and his prayer for peace delivered to the US House of Representatives on 12 April 1962.

A 'Call to Unity' is the third section of Merton's writings, and here Bochen incorporates some of Merton's views on the Second Vatican Council, inter-religious writings, and ecumenical pleas. In the course of the book, her selections demonstrate how Merton's voice and vision moved in ever larger circles—from the privacy of his personal conversion and his early days in the monastery, expansion through his personal commitment to social justice, to a player and participant in the world arena. Wisely, Bochen closes with an Easter homily Merton wrote in the last years of his life, 'He is Risen'. Merton's compassion rings through the piece. His words may have lost some of their political precociousness or surprise value over the years, but the core of his message still rings true. We have been called to share in the Resurrection, Merton reminds us in this final piece, 'not because we are religious heroes, but because we are suffering and struggling human beings, sinners fighting for our lives, prisoners fighting for freedom, rebels taking up spiritual weapons against the powers that degrade and insult our human dignity...' (p. 190).

The knowledge Bochen gained from editing Merton's work is evident in this volume, and among her strengths is her ability to incorporate so many different types of Merton's writing—journals, letters, poems, essays, introductions to foreign editions, excerpts from familiar and much loved books, as well as homilies and prayers. The book could be used as an excellent introduction to Merton or as a primer on Christianity and social justice. A word of caution is appropriate however, for true aficionados of Merton's writing. Those who have already invested significant time in a deep understanding of Merton's life and engaged with him as a kind of literary spiritual director (including, I suspect, many readers of this publication) may find Bochen's *Essential Writings* leaves them somewhat unsatisfied, hungering for the greater depth that can only be found through engagement with complete works, one that necessarily moves beyond just the essential.

Lynn Bridgers

WALDRON, Robert, *Poetry As Prayer: Thomas Merton* (Boston: Pauline Books and Media, 2000), pp. 169. ISBN 0-8198-5919-2 (paperback). \$8.95.

Thomas Merton's work and metaphysical visions of the divine-human relationship are obvious pairings. Such metaphysical visions are apparent in much of