

and 'Psychological Dividedness', as 'Receptivity', as 'the Loneliness of Not Being Understood', and as 'Fate' (pp. 264-71).

The chapter on Buddhist teachers has no such classification, but shows similar ambiguities. For example, when did the Buddha's 'experience of emptiness' occur? Gunn writes as if he means the 'four sights' (old man, sick man, corpse, renunciate), prior to his enlightenment under the Bodhi tree. At times, any disappointment or pain is an 'experience of emptiness', but at other points in the book, the term implies the transcendence of such pain. This hazy definition of the central term is ambiguous throughout the book.

Gunn associates the teacher-student relationship in medieval Buddhist monasticism with the relation of therapist and patient (pp. 53-54), though he later says they have distinct, if overlapping roles (p. 278). However, the relations of the three traditions represented by Dōgen, Merton and Jung are not equal here. Psychoanalysis functions as the over-arching or mediating discourse through which all the others are measured. For example, Gunn assumes the reality of 'splitting' (from psychoanalysis), and then says that this reality 'was accounted for mythologically in the story of the Garden of Eden' (p. 58). The story of the Good Samaritan is not about radical compassion or God's love, but about being 'free to respond to the needs of the moment', unlike 'people so caught up in their own thought' (p. 79). Nagarjuna's descent into the *Naga* (dragon) realm is interpreted: 'By going into the "foreign" territory where "strange" creatures called *nagas* live, Nagarjuna was able to forge an understanding of Buddhism that was ready to engage other foreign lands and cultures' (p. 22). In similar ways the miraculous and theological meanings are drained out of Christian and Buddhist narratives.

Informed by Perennial Philosophy and a highly synthetic imagination, this book moves among multiple biographies transforming historical detail into existential meaning. Much of my difficulty with this book is due to the fact that I am a historian, and I do not find this book sufficiently attentive to the historical situatedness of real peoples' lives. In a book which seeks to encourage in its readers a personal 'quest for transformation', a spiritual awakening to the here-and-now, it is not surprising that the there-and-then of Dōgen becomes a mirror instead of a window. It does treat the biographies in some historical detail, but in the end should be read as a theological text. As an addition to that genre, it may be welcomed as an opportunity to introduce Buddhists to Merton, Christians to Dōgen, and so on.

Eric Reinders

SHANNON, William, *Thomas Merton's Paradise Journey: Writings on Contemplation* (Cincinnati, OH: St Anthony Messenger Press, 2000), pp. 307. ISBN 0-86716-348-8 (paperback). \$12.95; and *Silence on Fire: Prayer of Awareness* (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Co., 2000), pp. 178. ISBN 0-8245-1848-9 (paperback). \$16.95.

William Shannon's *Thomas Merton's Paradise Journey* is a compendium on contemplation. In this work, Shannon comprehensively and very skillfully treats: contemplation in Merton's various writings; Merton's insistence on the necessity of solitude for contemplation; and Merton's understanding of the importance of the world as part of the landscape of authentic contemplation. Likewise, Shannon

shares many of his own insights concerning contemplation based on his ongoing development as a theologian.

Reflecting on the title of this book, Shannon explains that, in Merton's writings, 'paradise' symbolizes the original experience of contemplative joy. Since the Fall, contemplation is the way back to paradise. Shannon notes that contemplation is the 'explicit theme, or at least the implied background, of most everything that Merton wrote' (p. 7).

To shed light on Merton's understanding of contemplation, Shannon discusses the two ways of relating to God: kataphatic and apophatic. The kataphatic tradition understands God through affirmation and utilizes analogy to talk about God and God's activities. Contrariwise, the apophatic tradition is the way of negation that emphasizes God, ineffable Reality, is known as unknown. Shannon concurs with Merton that the Christian contemplative is a person who comprehends the necessity of the kataphatic yielding to the apophatic way of knowing God.

Shannon clarifies the difference between infused (passive) and active contemplation. Infused contemplation refers to the experience of direct contact with God by being filled with God's love. Shannon insists that no amount of human effort can effect this kind of contemplation, since it is God's gift. Active contemplation is the experience of union with God in and through activities such as vocal prayer, meditation and the liturgy in a person's life.

Shannon refers to Merton's *Seeds of Contemplation*<sup>11</sup> as a poetic reflection on contemplation as the discovery of the true God, true self, and others (p. 48). In contemplation, a person drops the mask of the false self and vanishes into God. Becoming free from selfish desires and attachments that feed the false self actualizes a person's capacity for contemplation (p. 57). Regarding this, Shannon remarks: 'We must not use up our life accumulating pleasures and experiences and power and honors that clothe our false selves' (pp. 57-58). Letting go of such self-seeking enables a person to seek God alone.

Shannon's treatment of Merton's *The Ascent to Truth*<sup>12</sup> is an excellent explication of John of the Cross' 'todo y nada' teaching regarding contemplation. According to this teaching, a person possesses everything when she possesses nothing. Expanding upon this thought, Shannon asserts that authentic spiritual growth entails being responsive to God's call to move from 'knowing God with clear concepts to knowing God in the darkness of "unknowing"' (p. 79).

Shannon highlights Merton's insistence in *Thoughts in Solitude*<sup>13</sup> on silence as the language of the person who chooses a life of solitude (p. 93). In the depths of silence beyond words, a person encounters God and realizes that, apart from God, he is nothing. Shannon concurs with Merton that it is a special vocation to belong completely to silence (p. 96).

In his treatment of Merton's *The Inner Experience*,<sup>14</sup> Shannon indicates that, for Merton, only the true self can be contemplative. The true self is only known apophatically; this is so, since the true self passes beyond the inner self to the 'I am' of

God. Prayer leads to the discovery and fulfillment of the true self in God (p. 148). Sin violates the true self. Shannon notes that, in Merton's view, technological society and TV culture inhibit the natural human disposition to be contemplative (p. 139).

Merton's *New Seeds of Contemplation*<sup>15</sup> stresses that contemplation entails a state of heightened consciousness of the transcendent Source of life and awe at the sacredness of all that exists. For Shannon, the great task in a person's life is to become aware that he is contemplative in the depths of his being (p. 169).

According to Shannon, Merton's *The Climate of Monastic Prayer*<sup>16</sup> emphasizes meditation. In this book, meditation and contemplation are equivalent. In and through meditation, a person discovers her meaninglessness without God and her deepest meaning in God.

In his discussion of Merton's *Zen and the Birds of Appetite*,<sup>17</sup> Shannon explains that, for Merton, Zen is transformed consciousness. Zen is superconsciousness beyond all systems or structures of philosophy, theology or ideology. Zen consciousness is simple attentiveness to or awareness of that which simply is. Shannon insightfully points out that in Zen and Christianity, *kenosis* or self-emptying is the path to superconsciousness.

Shannon's *Thomas Merton's Paradise Journey* is a work characterized by clarity of composition. Throughout the volume, the author consistently utilizes excellent quotes from Merton's extensive writings to convey Merton's profound insights regarding the nature and value of contemplation in the Christian journey. For those unfamiliar with Merton's writings, this book is an outstanding primer on the topic of contemplation. For those advanced in Merton studies, the work provides a systematic analysis of the theme of contemplation in Merton's writings.

In his revised edition of *Silence on Fire*, William Shannon sheds light on the prayer of awareness as the grounding of a this-worldly spirituality. Shannon describes this prayer as 'filled with God, on fire with God's presence... It is... prayer in which we experience our total dependence on God and our awareness that we are in God' (p. 6). The prayer of awareness disposes a person for contemplation since it provides a climate for the discovery of the inner, true self.

In *Silence on Fire*, Shannon differentiates between spirituality of devotion and contemplative spirituality. In the former, works of piety such as reciting litanies and praying novenas foster the development of the inner self. According to this spirituality, God is transcendent, separate from the world. Contemplative spirituality, on the other hand, is non-dualistic. It asserts that God is the Ground of all that is. Hence, for Shannon adherents of contemplative spirituality maintain that 'spiritual apartheid', that is, separation of God from God's creation, is fallacious.

According to Shannon, contemplation, which entails becoming conscious of one's union with God and all else in God (p. 35), transforms a person's lifestyle. Shannon reflects: 'Deepening our awareness of the Holy Presence means that we shall come to live in that presence with greater attentiveness during the whole of our day' (p. 39).

11. New York: New Directions, 1949.

12. New York: Harcourt, Brace & Company, 1951.

13. New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 1998.

14. Published serially in *Cistercian Studies* 18 and 19.

15. New York: New Directions, 1962.

16. New York: Herder & Herder, 1969.

17. New York: New Directions, 1968.

God's presence is a saving presence. Shannon states that 'God's very being demands that the divine presence be a saving presence. God is always present to save' (p. 52). Shannon insightfully enumerates various ways in which persons experience 'being saved': '...when we reach out to others in unconditional love, we are being saved. When we tear down walls and build bridges in our relationships, we are being saved. When we seek our true selves in the depths of our being in God, we are being saved' (p. 47).

Caring for others is an expression of the contemplative lifestyle. Essential to caring are dialogue, compassion and nonviolence. Regarding nonviolence, Shannon writes: 'Ultimately our nonviolence, like God's, must flow from the depths of our contemplative life. Our deep awareness that we are truly "at one with everything and with everyone" in the Hidden Ground of Love we call God demands of us that we live a nonviolent love' (p. 67).

According to Shannon, busyness, addiction to efficiency and productivity, and noise are deterrents to experiencing awareness of God's presence. One obsessed with doing has little time for being. In this regard, Shannon quotes Merton: 'We have not yet rediscovered the primary usefulness of the useless'.<sup>18</sup> Shannon notes that jealous or bitter thoughts and sloth also inhibit awareness of God's presence.

Shannon discusses learning to let go, waiting and accepting as helps in developing greater consciousness of God's presence. Shannon calls for: surrender of prejudices, possession of time and clinging to life; creative waiting; and accepting reality as essential practices for a person who seriously desires to embrace the contemplative lifestyle. Shannon views Jesus as one who modeled growth in contemplative being throughout his earthly life. The Risen Jesus experienced the final stage of contemplation, which is the utmost awareness or consciousness of the total communion of all reality in the Ground of Love.

In *Silence on Fire*, Shannon describes the Church as the 'community of those who are aware' (p. 150) of oneness with God and others in Christ. According to Shannon, authentic post-Vatican II ecclesiology rejects 'spiritual apartheid' by emphasizing the role of the Church in the betterment of the world. Shannon adds a wonderful ecumenical note to his ecclesiological discussion when he introduces the phrase, 'world Catholicism'. He elucidates this concept when he writes: 'I am not completely Catholic until I have found myself in my Protestant, Jewish, Muslim, Hindu, Buddhist brother and sister, for they have a part of that totality that being Catholic means' (p. 170).

In the conclusion of this book, Shannon describes contemplation as the experience of a person's subjectivity becoming one with God's subjectivity. Practitioners of the prayer of awareness experience silence as a consuming fire that empties them of all that is not God so that they are able to be filled with the fullness of God (p. 175). The prayer of awareness transforms them into true contemplatives whose solidarity with exploited persons flows out of communion with the Ground of all being who is Love.

*Silence on Fire*, like *Thomas Merton's Paradise Journey*, is a gem of a book. Throughout both texts, Shannon demonstrates his ability to write cogently. His smooth

18. Thomas Merton, *Conjectures of a Guilty Bystander* (New York: Doubleday, 1966), pp. 308-309.

style captivates the reader. Nuggets of wisdom that are reflective of the depth of spiritual insight Shannon has gained through his multi-year study of Merton's corpus of writings appear throughout each text. In essence, Shannon's *Silence on Fire* and *Thomas Merton's Paradise Journey* are treasure troves for any serious student of Christian spirituality.

Marilyn Sunderman, RSM

CHITTISTER, Joan, *Illuminated Life: Monastic Wisdom for Seekers of Light* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Book, 2000), pp. 143. ISBN 1-57075-233-8. \$15.00.

Under the physical guise of a book of popular spirituality, dressed in a beautiful dust jacket and formatted like a gift book, Joan Chittister offers *Illuminated Life* to her readers as a small but serious and wonderful work for the training of Christian contemplatives. Neither a systematic theological explication of contemplation or a self-help book, it is written, rather, in a style that is meant to produce in the reader something of the deep practice of contemplation it describes. Arranged as an alphabet book, each short chapter is preceded by a saying from the fifth-century collection of 'Sayings of the Desert Fathers' and is a meditation on a basic monastic virtue, concept, or disposition, from 'Awareness' through 'Silence' to 'Zeal'.

Though I can easily imagine my monastic friends slowly mulling over this book and deriving great benefit from it, it is not aimed at monastics alone. In it, rather, Sr Joan presents to a wide variety of readers, and especially to those living 'in the world', a way to begin to answer the question, 'what does it mean to be spiritual, to be contemplative, in the midst of the private chaos' (p. 18) that generally seems to define our lives in the everyday world of work, family, relationships, and prayer?

One example of the help she has to offer is her frequent reminder that the spiritual life is not meant to be a withdrawal from life, although the institutions of marriage and family, work, and even religion seem to be organized to prevent contemplation. Rather, it is to be something more like an internal focus on God. To this end the reader is urged to give up both the fantasies of peace and the never-ending search for the stimulus of soul-crushing variety to learn, instead, to take advantage of the large space that can be opened up for contemplation by attending routinely to the ordinary chores of everyday life.

Another of her on-going useful recommendations is that the reader understand that the life of contemplation is a 'life illumined by a compelling search for wholeness' (p. 14), not an escape from complexity. As such, it is not meant to provide definitive, exclusive answers to life's questions. In fact, 'contemplatives... never really "know" what anything "means"'. They only come to know better and better...that divinity is at the depth of them calling them on' (p. 77). Indeed, she tells us, where 'the faithful' only 'believe in God, seekers see God everywhere' (p. 14) across the centuries, cultures, and traditions, even where they are in apparent contradiction to exclusivist Christian claims.

Helpful also, I suspect, to what I imagine to be her mostly overburdened readers are her on-going reflections on the necessary balance between work, leisure, and contemplation. On the one hand, living as we may be, in a fantasy of escape from work, Sr Joan, the Benedictine, reminds us that even in theory to abandon work is not a human option, for Adam and Eve were set to work before they even