

In all honesty, I must admit that my own reading of *The Geography of Lograire* contradicts the one presented in *Inclusive Imagination*. I have argued that *The Geography of Lograire* is a postmodern poem in the best sense of the term.<sup>4</sup> Confessions of scholarly disagreement aside, it is in this tension between modernism and postmodernism that *Inclusive Imagination* is at its most provocative, its most powerful and, necessarily, its most incomplete. I say 'necessarily, its most incomplete' because *Inclusive Imagination* was not meant to be a study of the ways in which Merton is in conversation with, is informed by, modernity and postmodernity.

Yet, *Inclusive Imagination* is led to this juncture, this pivotal tension, not out of happenstance. Rather, I suggest that the book cannot help but head into this tension. Because Merton is a romantic/mystic who reaches out to the world, who is in conversation with multiple and diverse traditions and writers, Merton's work is marked by the dialectic of modernism and postmodernism. Romanticism as a language and history is important to Merton, but it is not enough. Mysticism as a language and history is important to Merton, but it is not enough. *Inclusive Imagination* demonstrates that he is informed by both, and is thus led to many other worlds, many other traditions, guided by these two languages and histories, but not contained by them.

All three reviews would suggest that *Inclusive Imagination* provides its readers a great service. With graceful prose it traces the ways in which Merton is informed by romanticism/mysticism and thus moves deeply into the world, deeply into conversation with global communities. *Inclusive Imagination* also suggests what might be the next important path in Merton studies. Following its subaltern lead, scholars and writers would do well to consider Merton in light of modernity and postmodernity. After all, consider that Merton, Trappist monk and Roman Catholic priest, came to 'encounter the divine by staring at a bowl of carnations in a monastery chapel or in looking at the statues of two reclining Buddhas in a part of the world far away from his monastic home' (*Inclusive Imagination*, p. 246). To make sense of this sublime image is, I suggest, the postmodern challenge.

Bradford T. Stull

KING, Robert H., *Thomas Merton and Thich Nhat Hanh: Engaged Spirituality in an Age of Globalization* (New York: Continuum, 2001), pp. i-x + 202. ISBN 0-8264-1340-4 (hardcover). \$24.95.

This is a fine and worthwhile book. While not exactly groundbreaking, especially in regard to Merton scholarship, its juxtaposition of Merton and Nhat Hanh on the themes of an engaged spirituality and interreligious dialogue is insightful and well crafted. King tells the story of the development of these themes in the life and thought of his two subjects in a way that elicits reflection on contemplation and action in the reader. This is a book, then, that leads not only to knowledge but also potentially to self-knowledge.

Contemplation (or meditation, in Buddhist terms) is central to this book as it is to the lives of Merton and Nhat Hanh. King contends that both men, though immersed in different religious traditions and starting from very different places, arrive at what can be called an 'engaged spirituality'. Thus they found a way to resolve one of life's fundamental problems — the tension between contemplation and action — and forged a

4. Stull, *Religious Dialectics of Pain and Imagination*, pp. 61-94.

spirituality relevant to an age of globalization. 'Contemplation, if it is genuine, must express itself in action on behalf of others, while social action unaccompanied by contemplation invariably grows sterile and unproductive. Contemplation *and* action are required for a fully integrated spirituality. This is the central message of both men and the over-arching theme of this book' (p. 6). King develops another theme as well: these two monks are models for interreligious dialogue. Thus King's thesis seems to be the following: contemplation or meditation is a sound foundation for the spiritual life. Genuine contemplation leads to action, to engagement with the suffering of the world. Contemplation or spiritual practice is also a constructive basis for interreligious dialogue. The life and thought of Merton and Nhat Hanh produce and demonstrate these points.

Thomas Merton and Thich Nhat Hanh met only once, for about two hours of conversation, at the Abbey of Gethsemani in Kentucky, on 26 May 1966. Nhat Hanh was on a speaking tour calling for peace in Vietnam, his native land. The two monks quickly established a deep spiritual bond. As a result, Merton wrote a brief essay, 'Nhat Hanh Is My Brother',<sup>5</sup> which helped to get Nhat Hanh a wider hearing in the United States. King uses this 'historic meeting' to introduce the stories of Merton and Nhat Hanh and the book's themes, which he then develops in the following chapters.

King traces the development of Merton's understanding of contemplation through a comparison of his *Seeds of Contemplation* (1949) and his revised and expanded edition, *New Seeds of Contemplation* (1962). As Merton's practice of contemplation leads him to a deeper understanding of self in relation to God, he 'turns toward the world' and begins to speak prophetically about the pressing social issues of the time and in particular about nuclear war and peace. As Merton experiences the unity of all in love through contemplation, he embraces his solidarity with others and takes responsibility for the world. Merton's contemplation results in action, and it colors his engagement with the world.

Thich Nhat Hanh was drawn to contemplation early in life and became a Buddhist monk as a youth. He soon joined a reform movement that was aimed at making Buddhism more attractive to young people through engagement with the suffering of the world. In Vietnam, suffering was tied to the experience of war, first with the French colonial regime after World War II, then increasingly with the United States. Nhat Hanh's 'engaged Buddhism' led to his alienation from the Buddhist establishment and from the governments of both the South and the North. In the early 1960s Nhat Hanh left Vietnam to come to the United States to work for peace where he found the root cause of the war. His exile from his native land continues to this day. He and his followers have established a Buddhist community in southern France called Plum Village, which sponsors spiritual training and Nhat Hanh's world travels giving retreats and teaching about Buddhism. Both the Christian contemplative and the engaged Buddhist teach an engaged spirituality.

In an age of globalization, interreligious dialogue is becoming increasingly important. Neither Merton nor Nhat Hanh recognized this early in their vocations. Merton is rather disparaging toward Zen in *Seeds of Contemplation*, and Nhat Hanh first encounters Christianity in its connection with French colonialism. Their experience of contemplation/meditation and their life experiences, however, draw both monks into the

5. Thomas Merton, *Faith and Violence* (Notre Dame, IN: Notre Dame Press, 1968), pp. 106-108.

Buddhist-Christian conversation, and both emerge as models and exemplars of inter-religious dialogue. Both use spiritual practice – the experience of contemplation/meditation – as the ground for interreligious dialogue, and both demonstrate that such conversation transforms the participants while deepening their commitment to their respective religious traditions.

In the final chapter, King reflects on the concept of engaged spirituality. Here he includes Mahatma Gandhi and Martin Luther King, Jr, as two other conversation partners and models. What I find missing from this discussion is a deeper notion of action. As an academic – a teacher and writer – I find the ‘action’ that flowed from Merton’s and Nhat Hanh’s contemplation encouraging, but it is a step removed from the practice of the corporal works of mercy as exemplified by a Mother Teresa or a Dorothy Day. Is the action of teaching and writing an adequate response to the experience of genuine contemplation? Can service and social action draw a spiritual seeker into contemplation, or is the movement usually from contemplation to action? These are the questions I hope Robert King will address in his next book on engaged spirituality.

J. Milburn Thompson

MONTALDO, Jonathan (ed.), *Dialogues with Silence: Prayers and Drawings* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 2001), pp. i-xviii + 189. ISBN 0-06-065602-6 (hardcover). \$25.

Merton’s practice as a visual artist has never been fully studied. This is not altogether surprising, given the voluminous weight of his legacy in writing. But Merton did leave over 800 drawings and more than 1300 photographs. What is to be made of them? It first should be said that not all are great works of art. Merton had a facility that only occasionally rose to the level of real quality. Jonathan Montaldo makes the case in his new book that the drawings are ‘relics’ of Merton’s contemplation, like the commentaries to God that he composed. Certainly that seems to be the case. Drawing, especially the late works inspired by Zen calligraphy and abstract expressionism appear to be a way the monk used to seize ‘the grip of the present’ in his imaginative and reflective life. As such, they seem to be by-products of his life of spiritual practice, not works of art designed in every instance to stand fully on their own.

In looking at Merton drawings now housed at Bellarmine University, it is these late drawings, mostly *not* included in the book, which are most compelling. These abstract drawings from the 1960s are on a variety of papers, some designed for art making, others scraps that happened to come to hand. Characteristically they are brush drawings in black ink, usually on a white sheet. The best of these calligraphic sketches show Merton playing with mark making, fully aware of the weight of ink on the paper, experimenting with degrees of absorbency ranging from translucency to the black sheen of more heavily applied pigment. Merton experimented with hand-printing and occasionally was sufficiently proud of what he had done to give an example to one of his correspondents. Some sheets show the barest of scratches: others are more fully worked out pictographs reminiscent of Southwest Indian designs.

The 1960s abstract works often come in series. For example, a series of circular designs run through a wide variety of kinds of ovals in bold strokes that look like Japanese or Chinese ink-brush inscriptions. In the elaboration of ideas that Merton explores in these drawings, issues of wholeness and disintegration, open and closed



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