

cluding struggle and doubt. Montaldo uses this point to show why Merton's vision remains timeless: "Merton witnesses our dilemma for us and suggests its hard cure by exposing his weaknesses as an essential means of identifying with his life's only spiritual master, Jesus Christ" (106). Merton's relationship to Eastern thought, his growing ecological and sacramental consciousness, his sapiential theology and spirituality as well as his contemplative journey via poetry, prose, journals and photography show Merton's expansive, pluralistic vision as edification for virtually anyone willing to explore his life and writings.

Notes:

1. Patrick Hart, *The Message of Thomas Merton* [Cistercian Studies Series Number 42] (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 1981).

2. Patrick Hart, *The Legacy of Thomas Merton* [Cistercian Studies Series Number 92] (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 1986).

3. Through quantum physics, Heisenberg's "uncertainty principle" undermined Newtonian physics because it suggests that, at the subatomic level, matter cannot be seen, controlled or measured. See pp. 119-133 for further discussion.

4. Thomas Merton, *The Asian Journal of Thomas Merton* (New York: New Directions, 1973).

5. The three characteristics are: "(1) a certain distance or detachment from the ordinary secular concerns of life; a solitude of varying intensity and duration; (2) a preoccupation (Merton's word) with the radical inner depth of one's religious and philosophical beliefs, and their spiritual implications; (3) a particular concern with inner transformation and the deepening of consciousness of a transcendent dimension of life beyond the empirical self and of 'ethical and pious observances'" (70).

Glenn Crider

RINGMA, Charles R, *Seek the Silences with Thomas Merton: Reflections on Identity, Community and Transformative Action* (London: SPCK; Vancouver, BC: Regent College Publishing, 2003), pp. xxv + 229. ISBN 0281056048 (British) (hardcover); 1553610911 (Canadian) (paperback). £9.99; \$24.95 CAN.

This engaging and attractive book consists of a series of short meditations on key dimensions of the Christian life, grouped in six sections, each with a brief introduction: "Being—The Search for Self-Identity" focuses on conversion and spiritual growth as a journey of self-discovery; "Being and Transcendence—The Search

for Ultimate Meaning" examines the encounter with God in the person of Jesus through the power of the Holy Spirit; "Being With—The Search for Friendship and Community" discusses community as sign and sacrament of the reign of God present in the world; "Being Against—The Search for a Prophetic Voice" considers the distinctive Christian commitment to social critique as an integral dimension of the life of faith; "Being For—The Search for Transformative Action" looks at both personal and social renewal as responses to the redemptive mystery of Christ's death and resurrection; "Being and Hope—The Search for an Eschatological Vision" emphasizes not only the final victory of the risen Lord but the call to make the redemptive healing of the nations a reality.

The individual meditations, each a page to a page and a half in length, develop a vision of Christian witness rooted in a deep personal relationship with Christ that leads to a commitment both to building authentic Christian community and to being agents for transforming the world. Charles Ringma criticizes the Church's failure to be "a servant, witness and sacrament of the reign of God" (xviii) and encourages his readers to find in solitude and the disciplines of prayer and meditation on scripture the resources for announcing and living the Gospel. Though not primarily autobiographical, the book does provide fascinating vignettes of the author's own quite remarkable life on four different continents: born in Holland, an immigrant to Australia as a boy, a teacher and social activist both there and in the Philippines, and now Professor of Mission and Evangelism at Regent College in Vancouver, Ringma clearly comes across as someone who has genuinely tried to put his faith into action, and as someone who is therefore able to put that faith into words as well. He draws on his own successes and failures, frustrations and struggles, insights and graced moments, yet the focus is always on God's work not his own. The progression of the meditations from personal conversion to social transformation is evident without being too rigid or constricting—many of the same themes recur in the different sections, suggesting the integration and interrelationships of the various dimensions of Christian living. Written in a conversational style devoid of jargon or abstract theorizing, the book is challenging without being at all self-righteous or confrontational. The author simply considers what the call to authentic discipleship entails in the present day, and invites the reader to take part in this process of discernment.

Aimed primarily, though by no means exclusively, at an audience that shares Ringma's own Protestant Evangelical perspective, the book rejects a conventional religiosity that focuses primarily on interior piety and privatized morality without seeing the implications of the Christian message for issues of peace, human rights, concern for the poor and protection of the environment. It also repudiates a narrow sectarianism: his ecumenical appreciation for the insights and contributions of other streams of Christian tradition, particularly for the Catholic commitment both to contemplative stillness and to active social engagement, is evident throughout the book, and is reinforced by the presence of his "conversation partner," Thomas Merton.

The actual contribution of Merton to the overall impact of the book may initially seem, despite the title, to be somewhat less than central. There is a brief initial overview of Merton's life and teaching (xxi-xxv) that emphasizes his "incarnational spirituality" (xxv) and the relevance for other Christians of his monastic commitment to solitude and community, to prayer and work, to sapiential insight and prophetic critique, as well as a concluding, not completely accurate chronology of Merton's life (215-19). (Merton is said to have begun teaching at St. Bonaventure in 1939 rather than 1940; Mother Berchmans becomes Berkman, and St. Lutgarde of Aywières, Lutgarde of Aywiues; *Cables to the Ace* becomes—shades of Eldridge Cleaver!—*Cables on Ice*; the listing of posthumous publications stops abruptly in 1992, omitting all the complete journals, even though passages from both *Entering the Silence* and *The Intimate Merton* are quoted in the book itself.) Each of the meditations of the book proper contains a single brief quotation from Merton, typically a single sentence or less, never more than two or three sentences. Occasionally, as in the reflection on "Conformity: Resisting its subtle power" (132-34), Ringma begins with a Merton quotation, in this case his warning not to allow "the noble Christian concept of duty and sacrifice" (132) to be equated with a passive servility to government dictates, and then continues with his own commentary on the same topic. More typically the Merton quotation is inserted in the middle of the meditation, and if it were omitted the reader would never miss it. For example, in the section entitled "An unremarkable source: Seeing the small beginnings" (32-34), Ringma recalls his trip as a teenager in Australia to the rather unimpressive headwaters of the Coomera River, and sees this as a metaphor for easily overlooked beginnings that none-

theless are of great potential significance. In the midst of his reflection he quotes Merton's observation from *Disputed Questions* that "it is not sufficient to know the water is there—we must go and drink from it" (33), and then continues with his own considerations of the human tendency to mistake the outwardly impressive for the truly meaningful. Removing the Merton quotation would have little effect on the overall message of the section.

The fact that there is always one and only one Merton quotation for each of the 139 meditations might give the impression that his presence in the book is somewhat contrived and mechanical—perhaps even to some degree a marketing strategy—and the fact that Ringma has published similar volumes focused on other figures, including Jacques Ellul, Dietrich Bonhoeffer and his fellow Dutch native Henri Nouwen (as well as a forthcoming one on Mother Teresa) might reinforce this impression of a standardized, formulaic approach. Such a conclusion, however, would be hasty and superficial, a misjudgment. While it is true that Ringma could have written most of the book with no explicit reference to or citation of Merton at all—and that such a book would still be well worth reading for Ringma's own insights into the struggles and joys of the Christian life—it is nonetheless equally true that Ringma resonates deeply with Merton's holistic spiritual vision, his integration of contemplation and social critique, his engagement both with the tradition and with contemporary challenges. Ringma knows his Merton well—he includes quotations from 32 different Merton works, and the passages chosen, generally not ones already quite familiar to Merton "fans," are always to the point. One senses that Merton has really been a valued companion from Ringma on his journey, serving both as an antidote to the rather rigid Dutch Reformed Calvinism of his youth and as a complement to the more expansive but sometimes socially disengaged Evangelical Protestantism of his maturity. The presence of Merton in the book is thus not exclusively in the specific quotations, but to some extent at least in the overall perspective, the incarnational and contemplative vision, that Ringma has come to share with Merton. For someone totally unacquainted with Merton, Ringma's book does provide an admiring and appreciative introduction that may encourage such a reader to seek out some of Merton's own writings; for those already familiar with Merton, perhaps the main advantage of his presence in the title and in the book itself would

be to draw them to make the acquaintance of Charles Ringma, who is himself someone well worth meeting, an unassuming but wise and engaging spiritual guide.

Patrick F. O'Connell

MORNEAU, Robert F., *Poetry As Prayer: Jessica Powers* (Boston: Pauline Books & Media, 2000), pp. 150. ISBN 0-8198-5921-4 (paperback). \$8.95.

Robert Morneau's book, *Poetry As Prayer: Jessica Powers*, is a wonderful starting point for those looking for new or alternative ways to pray. Morneau, auxiliary archbishop of Green Bay, and a poet himself, believes that "Prayer, the dialogue between God and humankind, has many sources. God speaks and elicits a response through the mystery of creation (xvi)." He suggests that "poetry written or read in faith can be a form of deep prayer... (it) helps us name experiences and feelings that are often illusive and ambiguous... (and) helps us know that we're not alone."

In this compact, attractive volume, Morneau reveals the power of poetry to inspire by featuring the poetry of the Carmelite nun, Jessica Powers (1905-1988). Powers, whose religious name was Sr. Miriam of the Holy Spirit, was born in Cat Tail Valley, Wisconsin, and lived forty-seven years at the Carmel of the Mother of God in Milwaukee, where she served as prioress for several years. Sometimes referred to as "Wisconsin's Emily Dickinson," Powers lived her entire life in conversation with God. Writing from reverence, thankfulness, wonder, and love, she took the words God gave her and gave them back to Him as poetry.

Morneau first read Powers' work in 1985 and was "astounded by... the clarity of verse, its simplicity, its insight, its rootedness in nature and grace (37)." Powers' poems are completely accessible. Grounded in the present, she saw God in the everyday, and offered her thankfulness to God in poems alive with images that reflect a quiet attentiveness to her natural surroundings: "To live with the Spirit of God is to be a listener./ It is to keep the vigil of mystery, earthless and still./ One learns to catch the stirring of the Spirit,/ strange as the wind's will./... The soul is all activity, all silence;/ and though it surges Godward to its goal,/ it holds, as moving earth holds sleeping noonday,/ the peace that is the listening of the soul (87-88)."