

As society continues to stubbornly invest in the impermanent power of money and violence, an individual's attempts to counteract that system can seem worthless, empty—even naïve. Through its simple, straight-forward style, this book reveals the fallacy in that myth of individual impotency. Gandhi's life serves as inspiration for the most average, seemingly voice-less individuals. His example enforces that we are the critical element to non-violence, the only avenue through which non-violence can be achieved. Only through our influence, individual by individual, can the cycle of violence be broken. Moreover, Gandhi and Merton confirm the essentiality of non-violence to our own spiritual health and the necessity of non-violence in guiding both our external and internal realities back to their natural, peaceful state.

Julie Frazier

Merton & Buddhism: Wisdom, Emptiness & Everyday Mind. Edited by Bonnie Bowman Thurston. Illustrated by Gray Henry. (Louisville, Kentucky: Fons Vitae, 2007), pp. xvii + 271. ISBN 1-887752-84-6 (paperback). \$26.95.

This is the fourth volume of The Fons Vitae Thomas Merton Series that focuses upon Merton's contributions to inter-religious dialogue. Earlier editions included *Merton & Sufism*, *Merton & Hesychasm*, and *Merton & Judaism*. The latest edition, *Merton & Buddhism*, is a collection of scholarly essays that not only examines Merton's interest in Buddhism, but also its influence on his artistic contemplations in poetry, photography and brushwork. The book is lavishly illustrated, with almost one hundred black and white photos of Merton, places he visited, people he met, Buddhist iconography and art, and Merton's photography and brushwork. There is also a stunning sixteen page full-color centerfold of Buddha figures.

The essays in this volume are divided into three sections. The first section includes a succinct overview of Buddhism by Rodger Corless and an overview of Merton's acquaintance with Buddhism and Buddhists by Bonnie B. Thurston. While this material will not be new to Merton scholars, it will be essential to those who have a more limited background in Merton studies. The second section contains four essays that examine Merton's experience with different Buddhist traditions. There are essays by James A. Wiseman on Theravada Buddhism, Judith Simmer-Brown on Tibetan Buddhism

and two essays on Zen Buddhism by Ruben L.F. Habito and John P. Keenan respectively. The third section of essays examines the Zen influence and themes in Merton's artistic contemplations. Roger Lipsey's essay looks at Merton's brushwork, while Paul Pearson takes his photography and Bonnie B. Thurston takes his poetry. There is a fourth, "bonus" section, edited by Thurston, titled "Footnotes to the Asian Journey of Thomas Merton," that includes interviews with some of the principle players in Merton's visit to India. While some of this material has been published elsewhere, there is some new material to be found.

Aside from its interest to those in Merton studies, this book would be very useful for anyone interested in inter religious dialogue or the history of Buddhism in America. It certainly belongs in the library of those interested in comparative religion and contemplative practice. Students of either Buddhism or Christianity will certainly be stimulated to investigate the parallels that Merton was already exploring decades ago.

Most readers of Merton, when they think of Merton and Buddhism, usually think in terms of Zen and Suzuki, perhaps rightly so. However, I think the essays by Wiseman and Simmer-Brown do a fine job of demonstrating the importance of Merton's contact with Theravada and Tibetan Buddhism leaders, practitioners and teachers. The week Merton spent in Sri Lanka is poorly documented and represents a significant gap in the historical record that could be further explored. The Tibetan journey is simply astounding. The importance of Merton's meetings with H.H. Dalai Lama and Kyabje Chadrak Rinpoche cannot be overstated. Both recognized Merton as a fellow spiritual traveler who had attained great spiritual wisdom. Merton received advanced teaching and transmissions from these lineage holders that significantly expanded his experience and understanding of Tibetan Buddhism. The fact that Merton declared Chadrak Rinpoche would be his Dzogchen teacher suggests that this was a turning point in his path toward Buddhism.

The essays by Habito and Keenan take up Merton's engagement with Zen Buddhism from opposite sides of the looking glass. The interesting ways in which the essays contrast and complement each other underscores the editor's skillful pairing. Keenan's essay takes on the issue of Merton's long engagement with D.T. Suzuki in light of contemporary criticism of Suzuki's Zen credentials and scholarship. In brief, Suzuki's Zen is a popularized Zen that under-represents the tradition's rich texture of scripture and reli-

gious practice. Of course, it could not be otherwise, Merton was a spiritual explorer, and he, like Suzuki, opened up passages that western students of Buddhism will long be wandering. Habito's essay avoids the well-trod path through Merton's academic and intellectual engagement with Buddhism. Turning the glass around, Habito looks at Merton's spiritual journey through the lens of the Sanbo Kyodan Lineage that combines elements of both Soto and Rinzai Zen traditions. From this perspective, Merton's becomes an exemplary Zen life, from his experience of *dukha*, the dissatisfaction or suffering resulting in the abandonment of ordinary life for a life of contemplation, to his experience of shared suffering of the epiphany at Fourth & Walnut, Merton's life is revealed as *nothing but ordinary*.

The third section of essays is concerned with Merton's art. Essays by Lipsey and Pearson explore the development of his spare visual style in both brushwork and photography. Thurston's essay on his poetry reveals that same light touch in his poetry. Together, the three essays may provide the most telling portrait of Merton. There is such a haunted, ethereal quality to his work, as if it is always pointing to something just the other side of the visible world. Merton's poetry and artwork seem to draw us to a place beyond sign and language, toward an immediacy of the spirit.

This collection of essays is a wonderful celebration of Merton's years of thought and experience with Buddhism. The editor, Bonnie B. Thurston, has done an excellent job of putting together a compelling portrait of a spiritual master. It should be required reading for anyone interested in this aspect of Merton's spiritual journey. The book could also function as an excellent introduction to the history of Buddhism in America. It is a truly beautiful book, both for its lush illustrations and the vision of Merton it evokes.

Craig Burgdof

Thomas Merton., *Echoing Silence: Thomas Merton on the Vocation of Writing*. Edited with an Introduction by Robert Inchausti (Boston & London: New Seeds Books, 2007), pp, xiii + 215. ISBN 978-1-59030-348-1. \$14.00 (paperback).

The book's title and cover photo serve the reader well. "Echoing Silence" evokes Merton's paradoxical embrace of two vocations – that of a contemplative *and* that of a writer – while the picture of Merton's hermitage worktable, standing against a backdrop of