

I did not expect this to happen. Reading Palmer's book for review purposes led me to approach it in a slightly more detached way than I normally would have (as a kind of devotee, like any other contemplative sympathizer). I did not expect, however, to reflect on my own inner turmoil. I came to realize that I have been living lately with three unrecognized paradoxes that until now I had not understood as such, let alone articulated even as problems. The beauty of Palmer's book, is in its capacity to reveal that the problems of the human heart are not private concerns but are paradoxically, hence intimately, connected to the lives of others. Or as Palmer uses Merton's phrasing to make the case: We and the world interpenetrate each other. Thus the same quest for certainty that torments and twists an individual life into a private bureaucracy is also related to the collective illusions involved in the forceful construction of a world steeped in nationalistic interests in opposition to those of other nations, other cultures, other ways of life, other children of God. Palmer does not fall into the trap of relativism, however, because he is keenly aware that paradoxes do not require the neglect of critical faculties but rather their sharpening. Thomas Merton stands as a model for Palmer as someone who lived through paradoxes, who did not try to escape or evade them. By living the contradictions, Palmer advises, we are "swallowed by grace" and allowed to travel with Merton and all the saints in the luminescent belly of a paradox (37).

Gray Matthews

Merton, Thomas, *Gandhi on Non-Violence : Selected Texts from Gandhi's Non-Violence in Peace and War*. Edited with an Introduction by Thomas Merton. Preface by Mark Kurlansky. (New York: New Directions Publishing Corporation, 2007), pp. xi + 96. ISBN 978-0-8112-1686-9 (paperback). \$13.95.

It has often been noted that the twentieth century, though rife with scientific achievements, also claims the title for the most devastating wars, the most brutal genocides, and the most widespread violations of human rights. In the first few years of the twenty-first century, not much has improved and has perhaps even worsened. Imperialism, oppression, and violence still characterize both the international and domestic policies of the world's most powerful nations and are becoming more and more acceptable by modern standards. This trend of violence and moral degradation became

clear to L.L. Whyte in the years immediately following World War II, though he viewed the future with optimism. In his eyes, the "uninhibited perversions" of society, such as its "relentless passion for quantity," "uncontrolled industrialism and excess of analytical thought" would experience only "a brief period of dominance" (2). Despite his hopefulness, however, he admits that "one more dark decade would disprove my judgment, revealing a rot deeper than I have seen" (2).

In his 1964 essay "Gandhi and the One-Eyed Giant," Thomas Merton looks to this very quotation as an observation that demands attention, particularly in light of the fact that the "rot" most certainly did lie deeper than Whyte had perceived. Merton's contemporary America was one of the Vietnam War, the civil rights movement, and of a nation emerging as one of the world's superpowers. It is not surprising, then, that Merton would return to one of his earliest works, a selection from the writings of Mohandas Gandhi, in this time of sociopolitical upheaval. The struggles facing Gandhi and Merton differed in specifics, but reflected each other in the most fundamental of ways. Both men challenged the existing definition of a contemplative life by considering social action essential to their spiritual wholeness. The similarities in the way these two influential men perceived the world and their role as contemplatives in such a world make Merton the perfect candidate to provide insight on Gandhi's writings and lifework.

At first glance, Thomas Merton may seem to be in many ways of the opposite of Gandhi. Drawn to a monastery at a young age, it is easy to characterize his personal inclination as one to seclusion or isolation. Mark Kurlansky remarks in his preface to the newly released edition that Merton, "unlike Gandhi, had a strong urge to withdraw from the world" and was even "considered a recluse" to the other members of the monastery (xv). This analysis, however, simplifies Merton's perspective on monastic life by focusing on his physical isolation and disregarding his obvious desire and ability to affect change through writing. The more important aspect of Merton's and Gandhi's lives is their shared "obligation to speak out" (xv). Both men responded to injustice with consistent yet patient fervor, recognizing the necessity for change but also realizing that the resistance of force that had so often been used in the past would only perpetuate the cycle of violence. "Freedom won through bloodshed or fraud," Gandhi writes, "is no freedom" (66).

Because Merton's ideas on social justice in many ways resembled Gandhi's, his careful selection of quotations exhibits an insightful understanding of Gandhi's approach to non-violence. Though compiled during Merton's youth, this collection shows a mature grasp on Gandhi's ability to masterfully balance a life of both activism and contemplation, a challenge Merton would have to overcome later in life. Divided into five different sections, "Principles of Non-Violence," "Non-Violence: True and False," "The Spiritual Dimensions of Non-Violence," "The Political Scope of Non-Violence," and "The Purity of Nonviolence," Merton succinctly highlights the fundamental characteristics of Gandhi's views on non-violence by including only the most illuminating quotations, which creates a sort of sutra-like feel to the book. Through this compilation, we see Gandhi's unwavering commitment to justice and, perhaps more importantly, his unshakeable foundation in *ahimsa*. Non-violence, he writes, cannot simply be viewed as a means to reach a political end, but instead "has to be all-pervasive. I cannot be non-violent about one activity of mine and violent about others. That would be a policy, not a life force" (66).

Merton's selection of quotations also enforces the ideal of non-violent activism as vastly superior to passivity. The distinction between non-violence of the strong and non-violence of "the weak and impotent" is clearly a recurring theme and an important element of *ahimsa* (56). Cowardice, Gandhi argues, often disguises itself as non-violence when in reality it merely contributes to a system of violence by accepting oppression without any active resistance. Remaining a victim of oppression denotes participation in that system and often results in the expansion of oppression.

In addition to his careful selection of passages, Merton further deepens his portrait of Gandhi through the opening essay, written years after the original compilation of quotations. This essay is important not only in terms of understanding Gandhi himself, but also in terms of appreciating the universal, timeless applications of *ahimsa*. Both Gandhi and Merton experienced the horror of imperialism firsthand—Gandhi as the victim of imperialism and Merton as the beneficiary. The injustice that had become commonplace in both of their nations, however, tormented each equally. Gandhi could no longer bear to see his nation oppressed and demeaned by the British Empire, while Merton was unable

to live in complicity with a United States rooted in militarism, materialism, and racism.

It is in their similar reactions to injustice that Merton and Gandhi are most alike and why Merton's essay so successfully expands our understanding of Gandhi's experiences and teachings. Merton sees a world that, like Whyte suggested over fifty years ago, has to a great extent lost its sense of spiritual depth and integrity. Instead of finding a balance between the "science" of the West and the "wisdom" of the East, "the one-eyed giant" of "science without wisdom" (3) has prevailed, resulting in "a schizoid society, schizoid national structures, schizoid military and business complexes, and, need one add, schizoid religious sects" (6). The tools of oppression have developed into subtler forms, but perhaps with greater consequences. The tools of reform, however, remain the same. Today, in the first decade of the twenty-first century, it may be easy to look back on Gandhi's experiences and attribute his success to simpler times, to an isolated situation, maybe even to luck. On the contrary, Merton's explanation of Gandhi's life proves that non-violent strategies have never been more relevant or even less relevant because they are rooted in timeless truth. Only through internal commitment to non-violence and a clear, spiritual devotion as strong as Gandhi's can true change be achieved. This is the lesson Merton learned through his upbringing in western culture and his studies of eastern culture, as well as the lesson Gandhi learned through his upbringing in eastern culture and studies of western culture. This is the balance between science and wisdom that eradicates the spiritual and social crisis in the contemporary world.

Gandhi's incredible wisdom and achievements can often mistakenly lead to idolization, to seeing his work as something godlike and therefore unreachable. In reality, however, that perspective destroys the very core of non-violent action. While the ideals of non-violence are perhaps divinely-inspired, it is imperfect humans, each as flawed as the next, who comprise its implementation and realization. In the final section of the book, we see a glimpse of Gandhi's confessions of doubt, his recognition of his own faults, and his disappointment in the fallibility of human action. Strangely enough, these quotations struck me as the most hopeful of the entire text, confirming that perfection is not a requirement and victory is not an expectation of non-violence.

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