

leave the reader sympathetic to his point of view, especially in regard to his objection to being asked to cease writing about highly politicized topics such as war and nuclear arms. Abbot Frederick Dunn, who was responsible for reining in Merton's zeal, is cast in a more compassionate light for supporting Merton's writing as a form of spiritual practice.

In the end *Soul Searching* succeeds in communicating an idea that Merton embodied throughout the course of his life. Through the film we come closer to ascertaining what Merton—as a contemplative in thought, action and within the deeper realities of his heart—realized through direct experience of spiritual life: which is to say, “the mystical journey is profoundly human.”

Arthur Giacalone

MERTON, Thomas. *In My Own Words*, ed. Jonathan Montaldo (Liguori, MO: Liguori, 2007), pp. xi + 112. ISBN 978-0-7648-1671-0. \$14.95.

Yes, Thomas Merton in his own words, but in a curiously narrow selection of those words, one that I find puzzling. I say narrow rather than focused; because although the book is designed as a selection of statements about what Merton saw as his “core task: to realize union with God by prayer and monastic contemplative living” (x), it provides in my view a very limited take on what “monastic contemplative living” as lived out by Merton actually was.

The selections taken together overwhelmingly emphasize Merton's identity as a Catholic Christian, and the place of Christ in his life as a monk.

I have not the slightest desire to contest these points; indeed, with the editor, I affirm them. But the book's overall effect is one that made me wonder whether it might not have been edited the way it was to prove to the editors of the recent American Catholic catechism, the one from which Merton was excised, that they had been mistaken in their decision to exclude him. The Merton of this anthology would never have become an interfaith pioneer, an outspoken peace activist, a practitioner of Zen calligraphy or printmaking, or the author of “Day of a Stranger.” In one excerpt from *Contemplation in a World of Action*, it is true, Merton does say that the monastic life is “not only contemplative but prophetic”

(99); but there is virtually nothing in the rest of the book to support or develop this thought.

Of particular note is the way that the issue of solitude repeatedly appears. Merton wants “an even more solitary life than we have here in the monastery” (4). What grows on him most (this was written in 1947) “is the desire for solitude—to vanish completely ... and never be heard of again” (33). He would like to go “into solitude for good” (35). “Without solitude of some sort there is and can be no maturity” (72), he says—not surprisingly as a worshipper of a “Solitary God” (72)—no reference here to the community of Persons in the Trinity. Again I freely acknowledge that solitude is a major theme in Merton’s spirituality; but there is something lopsided about how prominent a place it holds in the book. It does not hold up for us the paradoxical character of Thomas Merton who at the same time hungered for solitude and corresponded with hundreds in his return from solitude, indeed who saw his actions in the larger world to proceed from his experience of solitude.

Admittedly, Merton was a monk *sui generis*, monastic “in his own way,” to use a phrase which has been applied to Leonard Cohen—like Merton a poet, a dissenting voice, and a cultural icon. But he combined his wide-ranging thoughts, readings, writings and relationships, zaniness/Zenniness and mischievousness with a solid commitment to his identity as Christian, monk and priest. I am unable to believe, in fact, that the Merton of “Day of a Stranger” would have wanted to hang out, so to speak, with the Merton of the limited dimensions which this book offers to its readers. I would recommend to its readers that they read it in company with either Lawrence S. Cunningham’s *Thomas Merton, Spiritual Master* or by Christine Bochen’s *Thomas Merton: Essential Writings*, either of which offers continuity between the essentially early Merton and the later, socially engaged and transcultural figure which he became.

Donald Grayston

MERTON, Thomas, *Lent and Easter Wisdom*. Compiled by Jonathan Montaldo for The Merton Institute for Contemplative Living. (Liguori, MO: Liguori Publications, 2006), pp. xii + 115 pages. \$9.95 (paperback).

Each year, on Ash Wednesday, millions of Christians, begin the Lenten journey, hearing Jesus’ instruction from the Gospel ac-