

extreme of recognizing little or no common elements across times and religious traditions. Thus the variety of individual lives and testimonies that Harmless provides for his readers in the central chapters of his book are indeed "case studies" that support his contention that both within and beyond specific religious traditions, "points of convergence are real; so too are the points of divergence; both are illuminating, but should not be overdrawn" (264).

The book is finally not just a collection of separate essays on remarkable individuals, but a process of exploration that leads to an understanding of mysticism as "a domain of religion that deals with the search for and the attainment of a profound experiential knowledge of God or of ultimate reality [which] takes its literary form in mystical texts, its organizational form in mystical communities, and its practical form in the remarkable experiences and the broader lives of individual mystics" (263). The book as a whole provides concrete evidence that "mystics matter" because, in Karl Rahner's formulation, their experiences of the transcendent "are not discontinuous from our own" (268) but constitute a heightened realization of the human capacity for the divine present in all. "They are pioneers who explore the frontiers and limits of being human" (268), a description that echoes, not by chance, Thomas Merton, whose image as the fire watcher, "stand[ing] vigil at night in a lonely belfry" (268), aware both of the darkness of human personal and social sin and of the luminous darkness of divine love, provides a final paradigm of the "night vision" of the mystics, who "have learned to peer into the divine darkness long and hard enough to see a God-drenched world" and who "remind us that we too have eyes to see those fragile ephemeral beauties where drops of dew glisten like sapphires for a few fleeting moments in an inbreaking dawnlight through which most of us routinely sleep" (269). This very fine book is itself a wake-up call that encourages us to see and shows us where to look.

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THURSTON, Bonnie B., *The Spiritual Landscape of Mark* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2008), pp. 84. ISBN 978-0-8146-1864-6 (paper) \$12.95.

Can you remember your experience of an excellent retreat? Did the retreat experience have a transforming effect on your life? Would you like to rekindle this spirit? Thurston's book, based on her

retreat notes given to a group of contemplative, monastic nuns in Wales, has produced such a retreat experience. This is a captivating commentary on the Good News, stories of suffering and triumph told from the background of geographical and symbolic Palestinian scenes and landmarks. The work is complemented with an abundance of fitting contemplative prayers, reflections, sources as well as personal accounts and instructive confessions. The themes of place and spiritual landscape served as the focus of the 2003 ITMS conference in Vancouver, British Columbia, with many papers from that conference featured in volume 17 of *The Merton Annual*. Those who attended that conference or read the essays would undoubtedly appreciate *The Spiritual Landscape of Mark*.

A prayer of gratitude and a more intense desire to know and experience the divine mystery came to the reviewer during the reading. An entry to this mystery is presented through a deeper communion with Mark's Jesus. The spiritual retreat guide for this journey, Bonnie Thurston, is gifted, personable, and gracious in inviting the reader to take an eighty-some mile walk with her from the region of Galilee to the city of Jerusalem using the Gospel of Mark as the compass. Jesus says, "Come, follow me". Mark's compass needle points to the Suffering Jesus. Why the Suffering Servant? The author reminds us that the first readers of Mark's Gospel knew severe religious threats and persecution, personal and communal suffering, and daily fears. Mark's story was meant for these ordinary, everyday people. And, Thurston wonders, is it not meant for us today as well? (31)

Thurston is a Markan scholar. She has published several works on Mark's writings and she confesses, he "speaks deeply to me" (35). She delights in exploring and meditating on Mark's Gospel. There is an ease in her conversational style. Her spiritual commitment and longing is contagious. Thurston is eager to share how Mark purposefully mixes common regional landscape markers of desert, wilderness, valley, mountains, river, hills, sea, villages, gardens, and lake to reveal Jesus' journey and salvation mystery. We learn how Jesus deliberately makes use of these central geographical locations to reveal God's plan. They are sacred places for His teaching, healing, and spiritual journey. This journey is more than a walk. Thurston describes it in multiple ways as a living spiritual ecosystem of mind, heart, spirit in space and time. This pilgrimage is historical and it is present. It is a spiritual commitment to join the Suffering Jesus in His Passion, Death, and Resurrection. These

landscape landmarks are physically identifiable, but they also are spiritually present, hidden in the human heart. Thurston reminds us that our spiritual journey changes like the landscape, like the very scenery around us responding to varying rays of light. We look with anticipation and also with fear. Jesus is on this journey with us each moment, in each step.

Thurston draws on contemplative and scriptural scholarship to highlight these sacred landmarks. Early in the work she recalls how Thomas Merton quietly reflected on how vital his monastic home landscapes were to his own tranquility and contemplation (ix). Merton is referenced several times. She uses her own and others' poetry, hymns, commentaries, Greek root words and a map to add color and texture to her fabric. She begins each chapter with a personal contemplative prayer. Her introduction opens with a poignant, promising thought from Meister Eckhart. The entire book is vibrant, rich, solid with character, and meditative in tone. Spontaneous pausing for reflection and meditation on Mark's Gospel or from the text is expected.

Locations and places are used by Jesus to teach his disciples. Thurston wonders whether Jesus may have had a house, a home base, as written by Mark (2:1; 15:3, 19). This house was a stable place to rest and teach the disciples (16). Mark uses landmarks and ordinary places as doorways to union with God. He speaks about Jesus' power over the forces of nature. Jesus calms winds and waters, He transcends mountains, He gives sight to the physically blind, He exercises power over life and death; and after His own death, He arises from the ground through God's power. What is to be feared by His followers? Jesus prepares His disciples. He encourages the fearful as He pushes toward Jerusalem. Jesus is resolute. He teaches us what to expect as disciples. He is the Living Word. Are we not living this mystery of suffering and dying, says Thurston (31). Are we not on this journey? This is more than a walk; it is more than a retreat. This is the life of discipleship. We are walking toward our Jerusalem, our last supper, our suffering and death and resurrection with our Teacher.

About mid-point in the journey the author provides an "Excursus," a digression up the mountain for a brief respite, an unexpected rest from the long walk. But instead of restful leisure, we encounter a glorious manifestation of the divine mystery; we witness with Peter, James, and John the Transfiguration of Elijah, Jesus, and Moses. The author suggests that Mark's Gospel rests on the pillars

of three theophanies or divine manifestations: Jesus' baptism, the Transfiguration, and the cross/resurrection (44). She beautifully describes the deep spiritual value of the Transfiguration from the point of view of the Eastern Orthodox tradition. For this mystical tradition the Transfiguration is one of the most complete symbols of God's manifestation (48). On the front cover of the book is a beautiful iconic depiction of the Transfiguration by the remarkable medieval Eastern Orthodox artist, Theophanes the Greek.

This experience of revelation, of seeing God's veiled presence, strengthens us for the final few miles. We are renewed in a spiritual sense. But there are more hills yet to climb including the Mount of Olives to the Garden of Gethsemane and Calvary. Mark spends five full chapters on the Passion. Jesus urges the disciples on; He encourages and leads us. "We must finish the journey, travel up Mount Zion, enter the city of Jerusalem and face all that transpires there" (43). Mark stays at length with the suffering and crucifixion. God suffers alone and He suffers with us. God does not abandon us. His suffering is completely solitary and radical solidarity with all human suffering (64). Mark teaches us that this is our suffering as well. We learn to know God best through our "woundedness" (66).

Out of suffering comes the mystery of triumph. From the grave comes resurrection. The gravesite's heavenly messenger tells us that we are not to be afraid, but that He goes before us and is with us in our immediate uncertainties and future unknowns. Suffering will not end; but it has been divinized. We join Thurston and wonder, where do we choose to go from here? A new beginning awakens.

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