surname to her: Morton is a fine old name – it just isn't Patricia's (130 n. 25); and in the same note, let us restore Christine M. Bochen to the editorial team which gave us *Cold War Letters.*

The prime value which I see in this book is its location in the disciplines of philosophy and ethics, areas of enquiry in which Merton up to this point has not been strongly present. Indeed, I would take the book as evidence for an argument that to the many other descriptors we have used for Merton we may appropriately add that of social philosopher (I'm thinking here of Joanna Macy as someone to whom this term is commonly applied). We can be grateful to Barry Padgett for enabling us to do so.

Donald Grayston

CONNER, James, OCSO, David Scott and Bonnie Thurston, *The Voice of the Stranger: Three Papers and a Homily from the Seventh General Meeting & Conference of the Thomas Merton Society of Great Britain and Ireland* (Stratton-on-the-Fosse, Somerset, UK: Thomas Merton Society of Great Britain and Ireland, 2008), pp. 58. ISBN 978-0-9551571-2-7 (paper) £3.00.

This short and very worthwhile collection might be read as a multi-layered commentary on Merton's "A Letter to Pablo Antonio Cuadra Concerning Giants." While the latter gives us one of Merton's fiercest denunciations of Western and American imperialism – and its bedfellow, the "Christianity of Magog" – it also delivers one of his most haunting and unequivocally *theological* defenses of "the other," the one whom Merton calls, with the Hebrew Bible, "the stranger." Here, as in so many of his classic texts, Merton presses home the discomfiting insight that the violence that we decry "out there" is symptomatic of a more primordial war within ourselves. Who is the stranger? The stranger is the one who problematizes and punctures our solipsistic bubble, coming unbidden from "out of the forest" to reveal, unpredictably, the face of the incarnate God. The stranger confronts us at once with our own sinful and hallowed humanity.

In the first of these papers (1-16), Fr. Jim Conner details with characteristic clarity and passion what he aptly calls Merton's "Manifesto for the 21st Century" (1, 4), a call to our essential unity in God that comprises the very "heart" of Jesus' own life and ministry. Taking the "Letter to Pablo Antonio Cuadra" as his launching point, Conner weaves together Merton's most penetrating writings

on colonialism, war and peace with fresh insight from the Scriptures, Eucharistic practice, his own experiences with Merton, and even quantum physics (Diarmuid O'Murchu's *Quantum Theology*, a book Merton certainly would have appreciated). The result is unsettling and inspiring, a rousing confirmation of Merton's prescience as prophetic signpost in our post-September 11 world, with its own shocking (and banal) variants of the Unspeakable.

Given our present situation, one may wonder if there is any more urgent task for Christian thinkers – or topic, for that matter, in the vast field of Merton studies – than serious engagement with the "world" of Islam. Of all the strangers approaching (confronting?) us from out of the forest, who is more misunderstood or frightful for many American Christians than "the Muslim"? In the second essay, "Brothers in Prayer and Worship: The Merton / Aziz Correspondence, An Islamic-Christian Dialogue" (17-33), Bonnie Thurston tackles a subject perhaps far too neglected by Merton scholars to date (the present author included). With textual precision and the spiritual and literary sensitivity of a contemplative, Thurston offers perhaps the best available concise overview of Merton's sustained study of Islam, which occupied him from the 1950s until his death.

In what is surely a vast (and humble) understatement, Thurston notes that while there "is a great deal of material" on Merton's studies of Islam, "it is not altogether easy to find" (19). The essay, so carefully footnoted, is invaluable for gathering a great deal of disparate primary and secondary material into one place. To cite just one of many examples, while many readers will know of Merton's debt to Louis Massignon for the phrase *le point vierge*, Thurston fills out the Sufi background that infuses the term with so much pregnancy and allure in Merton's writings (18). (Here she draws fruitfully from several studies by Sidney Griffith in *Merton & Sufism: The Untold Story*.) But even more, only a scholar who has engaged Islamic and Sufi texts herself at a deep level could offer the critical assessment of Merton's legacy that we find here, including both the wheat – "Because his sources were good and his focus was on essentials, Merton's understanding of Islam was deep and affecting" (20) – and the chaff, which was not insubstantial. For example, Merton's "use of the word 'Moslem' instead of 'Muslim', and the flip tone and superficial treatment of material in his recorded Sufi lectures" to the novices are disappointing, indeed "almost incomprehensible." In short, his engagement with Islam was both courageous and

flawed, showing us once again "Merton's humanity, the bundle of contradictions that is the human person" (30).

With such judgments, carefully drawn over the course of sixteen densely-argued pages, Thurston invites us to go beyond merely celebrating Merton for his courage as an interfaith pioneer, which would cost *us* nothing. Implicitly she invites us, rather, to engage the sources, and forge the friendships, ourselves; that is, to "go and do likewise." Some fifty years after his first contact with Abdul Aziz, it is sad and telling, if not surprising, that so many of us are still trying to catch up with Merton on this front.

Poet David Scott rounds out these papers with "The Poet as Stranger" (35-53), a reflection on the "strangeness" in Merton's own life that "helped to make him the person that he was"; and further, that "strangeness is not necessarily harmful, [but] on the contrary it gives an edge to thought, a drive to passions" (42). Here one is happily reminded of Merton's description of the monk and poet, and perhaps the authentic Christian today, as a "marginal person." Yet I confess to finding much of Scott's paper itself difficult to navigate, even "strange," in the sense of "dreamlike" or "stream of consciousness" – what to make, for example, of a term like "vegetable eyes" (42)? On the other hand, like poetry itself, or the most haunting of dreams, there are gems to be mined here.

The strangely attractive insight, for example, that "How we see, is a theological matter, before it is a visual one" (42). And again, that "poetry works more by stealth, like the parables of the Kingdom in the gospels" (48). Also helpful is Scott's distinction between the more private, secret, and "Waldenesque" poems of Merton's earlier period and the later "more cerebral, ironic coded period; interrupted with a seismic force by the Margie poems" (46). While the author's thesis tends to disappear in the thicket of a few too many long citations and meandering personal and literary allusions, the paper on the whole opens a whispering window onto Merton's evolving incarnation as poet in a "season of fury." Here is a welcome invitation, with Merton and Elias, to "Listen . . . / To the southern wind / Where the grass is brown," to "Listen to the woods / Listen to the ground" (43).

Fr. Conner's concluding homily (55-56) reinforces the collective call in these papers for engagement and unity with a message of eschatological hope. We are all pilgrims, he reminds us – and *ourselves* strangers – on the road to Emmaus: "In that breaking [of the bread], may our eyes also be opened, so that . . . our hearts may

truly burn within us with a love for all people . . . . 'Truly the Lord is risen! Alleluia!'" (56).

Christopher Pramuk

SHAW, Mark, *Beneath the Mask of Holiness: Thomas Merton and the Forbidden Love Affair That Set Him Free* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), pp. ix + 246. ISBN 978-0-230-61653-0 (cloth) $27.00.

Author Mark Shaw's website includes a brief biography that opens with these lines: "Mark Shaw is a 'reformed' defense lawyer and radio/television personality turned author. Curious about the theological aspects of conversion and other spiritual topics, he graduated from San Francisco Theological Seminary with a Masters degree in theological studies in 2008." The subjects of his books (he has published "about" twenty) include an attorney, an aviator, a Holocaust survivor, and several sports legends. Shaw also wrote an investigative book on Mike Tyson's rape trial. When Mark Shaw turned his attention to the Merton story, he brought to the task the skills and perspectives honed and employed in previous works. Perhaps, more significantly, he also brought to the new project a fascination with and enthusiasm for Merton in whom he finds "inspirational words and teachings, ones that have greatly changed [his] life for the better" (220). In his "Acknowledgements," Shaw avows that the writing of the book "has been truly guided along by the Holy Spirit. . . . Many days I could actually feel the spirit infiltrating the writing, causing me to witness firsthand the power of divine intervention" (220). This statement not only suggests that the writing of the book was a very personal effort but may also account for Shaw's absolute insistence that he has written "the true story" of Thomas Merton's life. The provocative, some might say sensationalizing title, *Beneath the Mask of Holiness: Thomas Merton and the Forbidden Love Affair That Set Him Free,* states Shaw's thesis in brief: Thomas Merton was not the man or the monk he appeared to be. Beneath a holy exterior was a tormented man, held captive in his monastery by a tyrannical abbot. Moreover, the image of Merton as a holy man was carefully constructed and maintained by the Catholic Church whose officials conspired to hide the truth. When, in 1966, Merton fell in love, he embarked on a "love affair" that would finally set him free. And so, Shaw concludes, in the last paragraph of the book: "Through his experience with [M.],[1]

1. Although Mark Shaw refers to the woman with whom Merton fell in love