

exhilarating, but may give the impression that the Church of the future merely needs to recover the riches of the past. There is an interesting comment in the video on Cardinal Newman's notion of the development of doctrine as explaining the fact of change in the Church, which is unaccountably missing in the corresponding place in the book – did some pre-publication reader suggest that any such reference to change be omitted as too controversial? Fr. Barron is frank in acknowledging the sinfulness of Church leaders over the centuries, including the recent sexual abuse scandals, but there is no hint that the problem might run deeper than individual failure, that it might indicate serious flaws in the institutional structure of the Church and the ways authority has been exercised. While the spiritual witness of women is highlighted throughout, there is certainly no suggestion that a system in which half the human race is automatically excluded because of its gender not only from presiding at the Eucharist but from exercising any sort of official ecclesial authority might need to be seriously re-examined.

Of course the central purpose of the project is not to provide a critical evaluation of the institution of the Church but to reveal the riches and the vitality of its teaching and its lived experience. But those Catholics who are quite content with the present state of the Church and the direction it seems to be taking will in the end probably be more comfortable with and comforted by Fr. Barron's overview than those Catholics whose equally deep love for the Church is more conflicted and complicated – perhaps more akin to that of Thomas Merton – than that which is conveyed in book and videos. As admirable, impressive and inspiring as it is, *Catholicism* may be found by some of its audience to fall somewhat short of the full scope of catholicity.

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QUENON, Paul, *Afternoons with Emily* (Windsor, ON: Black Moss Press, 2011), pp. 88. ISBN 978-0887534928 (paper) \$17.

THURSTON, Bonnie Bowman, *Belonging to Borders: A Sojourn in the Celtic Tradition* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2011), pp. xx + 104. ISBN 978-0814633670 (paper) \$14.95.

The inner life, the outer life. Journeys across miles and journeys into the self. Journeys dominate two recent books of verse by two poets whose attention to detail and language heightens the spiritual depth of their work. Poetry has always been about the demarcation of spirit – what it is, who has it, how to get it and how to know when it is slipping away. These two works, one by a Trappist monk and the other by a theologian and former

professor, offer graceful journeys across the landscape of spirit.

Kentucky Trappist monk Brother Paul Quenon, in his *Afternoons with Emily*, has interesting companions who haunt his daily routine: Emily Dickinson in the morning, Rilke in the evening, and a character named Mad Monk in, I guess, the midnight hours and beyond. Like Dickinson, Quenon reflects on the coalescence of nature and existence, and, also like Dickinson, produces startling results. In “Day Withholding,” Quenon explores the paradox of how the most uneventful days can be the most meaningful:

Some days the world holds off
at a distance, neither hot nor cold.
No promise is on the breeze,
birds converse elsewhere. (17)

Earth and heaven are just “grey halves / of a closed shell” (17). It is indeed a day that, like the breeze, holds no promise. But Quenon’s point, I think, is that most days are like these, and it is through our noticing, our concentration, our willingness to let things go, that any “promise” is found anyway.

Quenon also includes his translations of a number of Rilke’s poems, including everyone’s favorite, “The Panther.” In translation, tone is more important than literalness, and Quenon’s tone is distinctive:

His gaze, from passing bars,
has worn so blurred, it holds no more
than bars, a thousand bars.
Beyond the thousand – a world no more. (39)

Notice the nice resonance of “blurred,” “barred” and “world,” an almost incremental repetition of variation in the “r” sound. This is what good translation should do – bring us the music of the poem. It is very difficult to pull off, and Quenon has done it earnestly here.

Bonnie Thurston grew up in rural West Virginia, and in *Belonging to Borders: A Sojourn in the Celtic Tradition*, she attempts to trace the Celtic lineage of her family and neighbors who inhabited that area during her youth. In the introduction to her book, titled “The Autobiographical Why,” she quotes her friend, Brother Jack, as asking, “When the scholar and poet wrestles within you, who wins?” (xx). Not being a scholar of theology myself, I am glad the poet won, in this case.

In fact, I generally mistrust any book of poetry that purports to be anything more than a book of poetry. To paraphrase Oscar Wilde, art should be as useless as a flower is useless, and if the reader takes away

any message other than the sheer enjoyment of the work for enjoyment's sake, the work is either flawed or has been misinterpreted. Therefore, though Thurston does provide contextual essays for each section of the book, I went into Thurston's book looking for good poems, not necessarily interested in any historical or theological context.

And there are good poems indeed in this book. Consider the first two stanzas of "Wind Holds," part of a sequence inspired by the Iona community:

Only the sharpest wind
clears away the enveloping fog.

On the bluest days
the wind holds gulls
suspended on shelves of air. (44)

"Shelves of air" is a brilliant metaphor, perfectly capturing the paradox of stasis created by constant movement of the nothing that is air. The poem ends with the line "storm's clarifying wisdom," an almost Zen-like epiphany underscoring the ability of chaos to help us achieve peace.

The best poems are about the simplest things. In "Poetic Justice: Berrying" Thurston's scratched forearm is a sweet pain, bringing memories of "canes taller than I am / gently dancing around me" (89). The poem ends with a delicious variation on the cliché that nothing ever comes for free, as she playfully asserts that while she got the raspberries, "they also got me."

Both books, then, offer simple pleasures without being simplistic, intelligence without pretention or pedantry, and – ultimately – fine poetry. Delights that end in wisdom abound in both works.

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