

response to the plight of the human condition.

The book ends with a perceptive Afterword (191-95) by Susan McCaslin, and brief descriptions of the contributors (197-99), all Canadians. And so we have here Merton on the edge. Paradoxically, the edge moved him to the center in many ways. It seems that of all the edges from which we have to choose—far, cutting, rough, leading, sharp—Merton as fully expected fits them all.

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MCDONALD, Mary M., *It Draws Me: The Art of Contemplation* (Liguori, MO: Liguori, 2012), pp. xx + 76. ISBN 978-0-7648-2179-0 (paper) \$14.99.

Our postmodern world explodes with a sense of widespread exhaustion, a vision of wars, storms and devastation. Many realize that world peace begins with one's own inner peace and this book makes the case that the silence of artworks (icons and Chinese Song landscapes) promotes inner peace. Dr. McDonald's goal for this practical book is to help us use such art in our daily prayer. She asks in the Introduction: "Can meditating with great works of art help you to pray better?" (xi). The book affirms this and achieves much more: it presents convincing evidence that use of these images can reveal a model for understanding our own life's meaning. As the author puts it, "How much more powerful would an insight [into some important aspect of our lives] be if an image could help . . . live that knowledge?" (vii).

Inspired by the challenge to develop college students' insight, Dr. McDonald finds the praxis of "reading" and abiding with images. "[C]onnection and application" and "listening through reading" are key monastic principles the author stresses (5). The book clearly aims to train readers in life-giving ways to become more truly themselves. McDonald's contribution to the literature on inner-journaling is, I believe, precisely this well-structured training, which Merton aficionados will find most appealing. The book features previously unpublished lecture notes on *lectio divina* by Merton, and the 32-page illustration section includes a photo of Merton plus Song Dynasty paintings and Russian icons.

The Dedication page mentions being taught "to always enjoy yellow leaves against a gray sky" (iii). McDonald displays here the same visual-verbal sensitivity shot through Thomas Merton's journals, that reveals him as one dedicated to closely observing (reading) nature, her colors and textures. To delight in creation is to affirm oneness with it, a special joy in contemplating the Chinese tenth-to-thirteenth-century landscapes

reproduced in the center of this book. Orthodox icons' stately compositions, by contrast, give access to mysteries of the Christian tradition, and Dr. McDonald guides us in reading them. The very term "iconographer" means one who "writes an image," and thus how to read the image needs to be learned. From personal experience, I can attest to the power of icons when used regularly in one's prayer time. Such an image becomes a living presence, a friend unlike any other, "alive and challenging," as McDonald says (8).

The author presents her research compactly and her selections of Merton quotations feature as images as well as text, reaffirming how her book trains us to read the other classic spiritual images. Merton's words build powerfully in McDonald's arrangement; they take us from a casual but common misreading of contemplation's escapist value, juxtaposed to: "The contemplative enters into God in order to be created" (A3). These choices pack a punch, and provoke one to look much further into his work. As a man tempered by the Depression and the Second World War, the existentialist Merton concludes that "it is not humanly possible to live a life without significance and remain healthy" (A31). To live in a state of compassion: this is the goal of the truly human life.

There are other manuals for art-journaling (like Marianne Hieb's fine *Inner Journeying through Art-Journaling* [Jessica Kingsley Publishers, 2005]), and for training in how to use art images in prayer, but McDonald's *It Draws Me* is the one each Merton fan should add to the "Praxis" section of a personal library. It satisfies those who would follow up on her scholarly sources, as well, because the author discreetly uses endnotes. McDonald points out that "We have inherited a sense of reading as informative and a sense of art as inert, and both prevent us from fully reflecting on and applying the messages that contemplative artists long to give" (5). The essential task is to actively "read" the art work, as in *lectio*, and listen to the message, the communication from the spirit of the divine within.

Active listening is the crucial skill in any learning environment, as teachers know, and McDonald brings the reader through a concise and intriguing history of this praxis for ancient monastic experts, from the fifth century on. She even introduces us to Greek terms for the "technology" of such reading. The expectation for an active listener/reader was that this practice would change the reader, as the text's (or image's) message was applied in the life of the reader. It is fascinating to know that "Medieval physicians assigned reading [aloud] as another form of exercise, like they would assign walking or running" (6). St. Bernard of Clairvaux reports not getting beyond the third chapter of the Song of Songs, when writing over thirteen years his eighty-six sermons on this topic. What an example

for us of deep reading! Our author follows this chestnut with a vision of Merton writing with such haste that “many syntactic errors” provoked the Cistercian censors to send him handbooks. Her analysis seems right on the mark here: more than mere rushing to get into print, Merton “was also in a way following monastic beliefs about the real goals of reading and writing” (7). Merton’s unpublished notes are a real treat. They explain the forgotten liturgy of Septuagesima Sunday in its historical context which is especially relevant to our contemporary world situation; this reviewer feels a special value in this entire chapter.

The contrast between monastic reading and that for a “university culture” is illuminating in this text. As McDonald states, Merton noted that “reading for *wisdom*” was one practice lost with the rise of the university in the thirteenth century. Clearly, the latter grew secular and systematic, promoting knowledge rather than communication with the divine. We need to relearn the monastic practice, if we hope to “read” icons or the Chinese meditative landscapes in the way they were intended. To look at an image as “a challenge” to our worldly habits is not the way art history, for example, is taught, but it is critical in the contemplative atmosphere McDonald encourages. There is much to learn in this book, and much to practice. As she puts it, “The most interesting aspect of this process of reading is that each moment asks for connection. The text is connected to the reader’s own life, to the community, to the divine. The reader was meant to grow in respect and love of the divine and others through this often solitary reading experience” (8).

A visionary phrase presents the reader with the ultimate goal of a truly human life: “that knowledge which flows from love and leads to more love” (9). A teacher who aims to train her students in life-affirming values and habits will find this book a substantive help. In a world where, as Merton taught in his final talk, persons must learn “to stand on their own feet” (see vii), Mary McDonald recognizes that many more people wish to know how rich these contemplative art resources are. If we recapture the insights within this book, her promise may indeed be fulfilled: “to experience more community, insight, and joy” (xi).

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HINSON, E. Glenn, *A Miracle of Grace: An Autobiography* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2012), pp. 448. ISBN 978-0-88146-394-1 (cloth) \$35.00.

E. Glenn Hinson’s candid recollection of his life is a grateful appreciation of the gift of life that he received from God, an unexpected gift he called