

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 Merton’s unpublished notes are a real treat.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).

Margaret B. Betz

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

“a miracle of grace.” Growing up in an impoverished and dysfunctional family in the Ozarks of Missouri during the Great Depression, he experienced much loneliness and pain from an alcoholic and abusive father, whom his mother eventually divorced. His older brother, who left home, also became an alcoholic. Reflecting on how he survived his childhood experiences and acquired a useful and fruitful life, Hinson believed that God mysteriously channeled grace into his life and helped him to respond appropriately to the grace of each present moment. Through hard work and determination, he acquired an excellent education from Washington University in St. Louis, Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville and Oxford University. He taught successfully in some of the most distinguished educational institutions in the United States: Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Wake Forest University, Catholic University of America, the University of Notre Dame and Emory University.

Two of the many providences that Hinson is grateful for were his switching the focus of his studies from New Testament to Church History and taking his first Church history students to the Abbey of Gethsemani in November 1960 to expose them to the Middle Ages. He met the monk, poet and spiritual writer Thomas Merton at that time. When one of his students asked Merton what he was doing wasting his time in a place like the monastery, Merton responded that he believed in prayer and that prayer was his vocation. Hinson was much impressed that Merton would consider prayer as a vocation. After that first meeting, Hinson took his students to Gethsemani every semester. In his journal, *Turning Toward the World*, Merton referred to Hinson as “the Church history man” and described him as “a good and sincere person.”<sup>1</sup> Merton had a good rapport with the Southern Baptist Seminary students and Hinson. Merton appreciated his contact with them and thought that having them come to the hermitage was a mystifying game in which God would make things well.

Hinson found a deep spiritual foundation in Merton. Hinson perceived that his students needed more than just information; they wanted and needed spiritual formation just as he did. He gradually discovered the foundations of contemplative prayer. Contacts with Merton and Douglas Steere, a Quaker philosopher, scholar and ecumenist, greatly helped Hinson in his spiritual formation and in developing courses in “Teaching Classics of Christian Devotion” and “Prayer in Christian History.”

Hinson saw the convergence of the opening of the Second Vatican Council and the launching of his career as a professor of Church history as very providential. He became involved with the Ecumenical Institute

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1. Thomas Merton, *Turning Toward the World: The Pivotal Years. Journals, vol. 4: 1960-1963*, ed. Victor A. Kramer (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1996) 109 [4/18/1961].

of Spirituality and was engaged in many ecumenical conversations in the Faith and Order Commission of the World Council of Churches. He was also invited to speak on the subject of spirituality. In the course of his teaching career, he discerned a calling to do something about the spiritual formation or preparation of ministers. He helped shape a curriculum with a focus on spiritual formation for ministry as the integrative factor in the training of ministers.

Hinson's memoir is a hefty book of 448 pages. It contains thirty-two pictures from his childhood, marriage, career and retirement. The last two sentences in the first paragraph on page 91 were not well proofed and need some revision. Appendix A provides his succinct response for the Academic Personnel Committee and Board of Trustees of the Baptist Theological Seminary on February 3, 1992. The next three appendices present a chronology of his major engagements from 1985 to the present. There is also a list of all of Hinson's publications arranged chronologically within types of publications. His detailed description of his life experiences can sometimes be difficult to read; yet it is also an inspiration to see how he lived through and overcame some of his sufferings. He is unabashed in relating how overwhelmed and unprepared he was to becoming deaf and losing his voice. In coping with these he felt the genuine concern of many persons who truly cared for him and he also discovered more keenly God's presence—God's joining him in these vulnerabilities. "What comforts me," he writes, "is that God is with me in my deafness or whatever else I confront in life" (362).

*A Miracle of Grace* is an indispensable primary resource in understanding Hinson's side in the fundamentalist efforts to remove him from the faculty of Southern Seminary where he taught for more than thirty years. He was encouraged to write his autobiography by his academic colleagues and friends who were familiar with the fundamentalist attacks he received. Hinson shares with his readers his experience of this most devastating interruption in his life. He notes that fundamentalists focused their attention on him for the first time in 1979 and 1980. Paige Patterson, who was then president of Criswell Bible College in Dallas, was critical of Hinson's book *Jesus Christ*, and had misrepresented what Hinson wrote in his book. In Patterson's interview with the editor of the *Baptist Standard* on April 14, 1980, Patterson listed Hinson as one of seven "liberals" in Southern Baptist life. Hinson provides a clear and consistent defense against Patterson's attack.

On August 22, 1980, Bailey Smith, then president of the Southern Baptist Convention, remarked that "Almighty God did not hear the prayer of a Jew." Smith refused to apologize for his offensive statement. None

of Hinson's colleagues responded to Bailey Smith's statement. Hinson wrote an open letter to Smith showing the problems he saw in Smith's remark. Hinson noted that Jesus was a Jew, lived and died a Jew. He showed how Smith's remark not only disenfranchised Jesus' prayer, but the prayers of everyone from Abraham to Jesus. Hinson's last sentence asserted that statements such as the ones Smith made "are the stuff from which holocausts come" (237). He agonized about publishing the letter but he realized that the time to speak out was then, so he sent it to the Kentucky Baptist state paper. His open letter to Bailey Smith created an explosive incident that made Hinson a "marked man among fundamentalists." The interfaith community, however, distributed copies of his letter to its members. He was told that the *Jerusalem Post* noted that if it were not for his letter, the Jewish Knesset would have kicked all Southern Baptist missionaries out of Jerusalem.

Hinson wrote in his journal on September 17, 1980, that the Bailey Smith incident strengthened his decision to leave Southern Baptist Seminary, but the final nudge that pushed him to move to the religion department of Wake Forest University was the news of his colleague Dale Moody being forced into retirement from Southern. Moody's position that it was possible for Christians to fall from grace conflicted with the Southern Baptists' belief on the absolute security of the believer.

Hinson stayed at Wake Forest University from 1982 to 1984. He was much excited by the number of people who sought his guidance on the subject of spirituality. His book, *A Serious Call to a Contemplative Lifestyle*, was well read in colleges, universities and churches and Hinson did many retreats based on the book. He went deeper and combined spirituality with peacemaking and continued his ecumenical activities. He left Wake Forest and returned to Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in 1984. He thought that by returning to Southern Seminary he could forestall the fundamentalist takeover of that institution. He calls the period from 1984 to 1991 "the lean years" in which he tried as best he could to be attentive to the presence of God while a crusade to get him out of Southern Seminary was initiated by James Stroud, the pastor of a small congregation in Knoxville, Tennessee. In 1991, Hinson was invited to teach at the International Baptist Seminary in Rushlikon, Switzerland. While he was making plans for his students' field trip to historical sites, he was told that the Foreign Mission Board of the Southern Baptist Convention had defunded Rushlikon. It seemed that it was the end of Hinson's career, but casting his cares to God got him through that and other situations. He felt God's presence in the courage and support his family, students and friends in other religious institutions gave to him. He wrote: "God

was there in my connections with the church in all of its multiple expressions—as local congregations, denominations, international assemblies, academic meetings and endless other expressions” (272). Hinson hopes that after reading his autobiography, his readers may learn more about the way God enters an ordinary human life.

Erlinda G. Paguio

GREENE, DANA, *Denise Levertov: A Poet's Life* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2012), pp. xiv + 307. ISBN 978-0-252-03710-8 (cloth) \$35.00.

Writing a cradle-to-grave life story of any accomplished public figure must be a feat of consuming research, methodical organization and purposeful composition. The effective biographer selects and arranges details of formative factors, developments, conflicts and resolutions to produce a comprehensive, credible profile of one individual's time on earth. The literary biographer perhaps faces an additional challenge, for no narrative of a writer's life can effectively illuminate that person's character unless the author also integrates the writer's works into the story. And if the writer is a poet, the task of rendering a life on paper must be further complicated by the characteristic complexity of the genre. And while Wordsworth's claim that "Poets in [their] youth begin in gladness; / But thereof come in the end despondency and madness" may not describe the exact trajectory of every poet's life, the not uncommon psychic intensity of the committed poet presents the biographer with yet more intricate territory to navigate in order to capture her subject for the reader. Dana Greene, Dean Emerita of Oxford College of Emory University, meets such challenges masterfully in this first full-length study of the life of Denise Levertov (1923-1997), aptly subtitled *A Poet's Life*.

The poet whom Thomas Merton in 1961 called "splendid"<sup>1</sup> led a rich and energetic life from her early days in her native country of England to her last days in Seattle, Washington, where she died from lymphoma, a disease she optimistically and stoically bore, choosing to conceal it from even some of her closest friends. Moreover, from the beginning, hers was a searcher's life, a determined journey to find love, to promote peace, to discover union with God, and to convey truth through poetry, perhaps the central source of connection between Levertov and Merton, a feature that makes Dana Greene's biography an especially valuable read for both

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1. Thomas Merton, *The Courage for Truth: Letters to Writers*, ed. Christine M. Bochen (New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 1993) 127 [10/14/1961 letter to Ernesto Cardenal].