

abbey and sends warm greeting to his friends in the community.<sup>3</sup> His words are a sad and affectionate farewell to those of us who will always be indebted to our greatly appreciated brother and dedicated teacher.

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GARDNER, Fiona, *The Only Mind Worth Having: Thomas Merton and the Child Mind*, Foreword by Rowan Williams (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2015), pp. xiv + 228. ISBN 978-1-4982-3022-3 (paper) \$27.00.

Early in her new book, Fiona Gardner notes that there is only a single reference to child/children in the indices to the seven volumes of Thomas Merton's complete journals (4), a statistic that might seem to indicate that this topic is rather peripheral to Merton's thought. But as she convincingly demonstrates in this perceptive and wide-ranging exploration of the theme of the "child mind" in Merton's writing, it is on the contrary a key image intrinsically linked with much of what is most significant in Merton's spiritual teaching. It has perhaps been too easily overlooked or taken for granted by readers and commentators, but that should change due to Gardner's thorough and thoroughly engaging presentation here.

The fundamental context for the entire discussion is the message of Jesus that "unless you change and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven" (Mt. 18:3; cf. Mk. 10:15, Lk. 18:17) (1). Merton is considered principally as a guide to understanding and putting into practice this gospel admonition, which is echoed in various ways by the poets, psychologists and spiritual writers whose insights are drawn on throughout the book. As an experienced psychoanalytic therapist and spiritual director, the author has both a wide and deep acquaintance with relevant theoretical sources and an extensive engagement in clinical and pastoral practice that guards against an overly cerebral or abstract treatment of the topic. Her approach is empathetic and (to use a favorite Merton term) sapiential, a participatory way of knowing marked, as Archbishop Rowan Williams points out in his preface, by her "sensitivity, warmth and candour" (x) that encourage the reader to place trust in her wisdom and spiritual maturity.

In her opening chapter (1-11) Gardner provides a concise articulation of her central thesis that for Thomas Merton the "child mind" is a synthesis of the openness and wonder of childhood responsiveness to the mystery of existence and the reawakening and recovery of this simplicity, this

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3. Thomas Merton, *The School of Charity: Letters on Religious Renewal and Spiritual Direction*, ed. Patrick Hart (New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 1990) 416-17.

purity of heart, in the midst of the complexities of adult experience. It is a rediscovery of authentic identity, of the true self called into being by the Creator, through a “letting go of the self or the disguise that we present to the world” (4). It is neither simplistic nor sentimental, neither reductive nor escapist, but a lived recognition of and response to the inner unity of all reality that is accessible through the self-surrender and immediate awareness of the divine presence in contemplation. It is not conformity to a static essence but (as Merton writes in the one passage on childhood referenced in the journal indices) an acceptance of one’s essential status as a “child of God,” which is an acceptance of “living growth, becoming, possibility, risk, and joy in the negotiation of risk,” the dynamic growth of the child “in wisdom and grace” that is pleasing to God (4).<sup>1</sup>

The succeeding chapters of the book (helpfully outlined in the remainder of chapter 1) are grouped in three coherently organized but not rigid or constrictive sections: “Understanding” (chapters 2-6), which provides an overview of the multiple lenses through which the “child mind” can be considered; “Re-finding” (chapters 7-10), an examination of “practical ways of orienting the adult mind to re-enter the mind of the child” (8); and “Becoming” (chapters 11-15), focused on the various dimensions of the actual experience of encountering the world through the reawakened “child mind.”

Part I begins with a chapter on “Infancy and Rebirth” (15-27) that draws on poets such as Rilke, Wordsworth and Henry Vaughan, who recall childhood consciousness as having an intuitive awareness of the infinite, then moves on to theorists including D. W. Winnicott, Jacques Lacan and C. G. Jung, who recognize both the developing sense of selfhood and the fragility of this process, both the innocence of the child and its inevitable death, both the powerlessness and the freedom of the young. At the center of this discussion is the figure of Jesus, whose command to his disciples to become like a child is recognized “as equivalent to a koan” (26), a paradoxical self-realization that cannot be achieved by logical analysis, nor by a regression to an immature fantasy of a world, and a self, unmarked by evil, but only by a breakthrough that transcends the split between innocence and experience in the gift of purity of heart. Chapter 3 (28-42) presents what Gardner refers to as the “psychodynamics” of relating to God both as parent and as child, with particular emphasis on maternal images of God as found in Eckhart, the Curé of Ars, the early Cistercians and Julian of Norwich, and with Jesus as the supreme model both of total dependency on his Father and of a non-dualistic identification

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1. Thomas Merton, *Dancing in the Water of Life: Seeking Peace in the Hermitage. Journals, vol. 5: 1963-1965*, ed. Robert E. Daggy (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1997) 334.

with the Father. At the same time there is a parallel tradition of the child Christ, the indwelling Word, being continually reborn within oneself, a participation in the unending process of the Word becoming flesh, a sharing both in the role of Mary and in that of Christ himself, who is present in the depths of the person in order that each person may incarnate him in his or her own place and time.

While pertinent quotations from Merton are included and discussed in these preliminary chapters, the particular influences from the Christian spiritual and theological tradition on his developing understanding of the “child mind” are the central focus of chapter 4 (43-56): the Cistercians Bernard and Gueric, the Franciscans Bonaventure and Scotus as well as the Poverello himself, St. Thérèse of Lisieux and her “little way of spiritual childhood” (49), and the contemporary theologian Karl Barth, about whom Merton wrote memorably that his love for Mozart, “always a child ‘in the higher meaning of that word’” though he was deprived by his musical genius of a “normal” childhood, would be his salvation: “Fear not, Karl Barth! Trust in the divine mercy. Though you have grown up to become a theologian, Christ remains a child in you” (55-56).<sup>2</sup> This survey of the Christian resources for Merton’s awareness of the importance of the “child mind” is complemented in the following chapter (57-70) by a look to the East, where the Confucian master Mencius, the “beginner’s mind” of Zen, and the necessity of becoming, or recognizing oneself as, the “child of Tao”<sup>3</sup> in the teaching of Chuang Tzu reinforce the insights gleaned from the New Testament and Christian tradition. Here Gardner cites the source for her book’s title, Merton’s prayer for his friend and guide to Oriental thought, John Wu, asking “the Lord to give you every blessing and joy and to keep ever fresh and young your ‘child’s mind’ which is the only one worth having” (62).<sup>4</sup> (While it is quoted in part as an epigraph [vi] this passage appears in the text for the first time only at this point; it would perhaps be more effectively included in the opening chapter. Likewise Merton’s other explicit use of the phrase “child mind,” in a journal passage<sup>5</sup>

2. Thomas Merton, *Conjectures of a Guilty Bystander* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1966) 3-4.

3. See Thomas Merton, *The Way of Chuang Tzu* (New York: New Directions, 1965) 133.

4. Thomas Merton, *The Hidden Ground of Love: Letters on Religious Experience and Social Concerns*, ed. William H. Shannon (New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 1985) 614 [4/1/1961].

5. Thomas Merton, *The Other Side of the Mountain: The End of the Journey. Journals, vol. 7: 1967-1968*, ed. Patrick Hart (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1998) 240 [11/2/1968]; subsequent references will be cited as “OSM” parenthetically in the text.

from Asia where he is discussing the great Tibetan master Milarepa as exemplifying “the ‘child mind,’ which is recovered *after* experience. Innocence – to experience – to innocence” is quoted only near the very end of the book [204] whereas it would also provide a valuable perspective on the significance of the phrase for Merton if it had been part of the introductory discussion.) For Zen and Eastern thought generally, Gardner points out, true childlikeness “does not mean a regression or a retreat to the naiveté of a child. It is not about being simplistic, stupid or ignorant; rather it is about approaching awake and alive with curiosity and enthusiasm” (70). To complete this first section Gardner in chapter 6 (71-82) draws on Merton’s famous reference to moving “beyond the shadow and the disguise” (*OSM* 323) during his encounter with the Buddha statues at Polonnaruwa the week before his death, finding a parallel in Jung’s concepts of the shadow – “the parts that we keep hidden or would rather not know about” – and the persona, or mask “that we present to the world about who we are” (72) – what Merton refers to as the false self. Here she considers the “life of care” that makes it so difficult for people to experience the fresh vision of the child mind, a difficulty increased by the materialism and technologism that results too often in the eclipse of mystery in the contemporary world. (While the social and cultural context of the contemporary world is recognized as contributing to the problem of estrangement from the true self or child mind, there is no discussion of whether or how the healing of the alienated self can lead to the healing of the alienated society. It would be interesting to consider the rediscovery of the child mind as having a prophetic as well as a sapiential dimension, as leading to a commitment to nonviolence and to liberation for the oppressed and excluded, as well as a sense of environmental responsibility. Perhaps Gandhi’s practice of karma yoga, with its complete detachment from the fruits of one’s actions and childlike trust that at the proper time God will make use of whatever work one has been given to do, might be a starting point for such reflection.)

Gardner’s recognition of the burdens of “a life of care” prepares the reader for the second section of the book, “Re-finding.” Here the author first examines (85-97) the pattern of enchantment and disenchantment that leads from innocence to experience of a fallen world and a fallen self, with the possibility of a re-enchantment through an awareness of a transcendent Center beyond the self. Merton’s own early experience of loss and loneliness, of psychic and spiritual wounds, related in chapter 8 (98-110), links him with those who have endured similar and even more traumatic childhood crises, and his subsequent conversion and growth

are presented by Gardner as a sign of hope for recovery of authentic freedom and healing. In chapter 9 (111-25), she considers three sources of this spiritual and psychological healing: first grace, the unexpected, unmerited transformative encounter with divine love and acceptance in the midst of the struggles and pain of everyday existence; then spiritual direction, the mediated insight into reality and the real self through the agency of a spiritual guide who enables someone to recognize difficult truths about oneself through a combination of honesty and acceptance on the part of both director and directee; and finally psychotherapy, a path to self-knowledge that can complement but not replace spiritual awareness. This attentiveness to both the outer and inner world, considered in chapter 10 (126-38), is what Merton often called paradise consciousness, insight into reality as intended by the Creator, often hidden but still present despite the deformation and degradation caused by human selfishness and human cruelty.

In her third and final section Gardner draws on Merton for images and resources to aid in the recovery of this transformed awareness. In chapter 11 (141-54) she focuses on Merton's evocation of the cosmic dance as a participation in the sacramentality of the created world, the "huge chorus of living beings" (153)<sup>6</sup> that testifies to the creative power, wisdom and goodness of God. In the following chapter (155-69) she turns to poetry as "the language of the child mind" (155), citing Merton's declaration that "All really valid poetry . . . is a kind of recovery of paradise" (156),<sup>7</sup> as illustrated by Louis Zukofsky, by Thoreau and Raïssa Maritain and Alice Meynell, by Peguy and Wordsworth and Blake, and by "Grace's House," Merton's own superb verse meditation on "paradise, O child's world! / Where all the grass lives / And all the animals are aware!" (158).<sup>8</sup> This consideration of poetic creativity leads to a more general reflection on the freedom of play, above all "The Divine Play of God" (170-82) in creation and the power of imagination to transcend pragmatic and utilitarian motivation and participate in this "pointless" celebration of the joy of being, beyond rational calculation and achievement. As Gardner notes in her penultimate chapter (183-

6. Thomas Merton, *The Sign of Jonas* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1953) 360.

7. Thomas Merton, *The Literary Essays of Thomas Merton*, ed. Patrick Hart, OCSO (New York: New Directions, 1981) 128.

8. Thomas Merton, *The Collected Poems of Thomas Merton* (New York: New Directions, 1977) 331; while "Grace's House" is arguably the best of Merton's poems on the child mind, it is far from the only one: see for example, "Aubade: Lake Erie," "The Winter's Night," "Evening," "St. Agnes: A Responsory" and "The Holy Child's Song," all from Merton's first published book of verse, *Thirty Poems* (*Collected Poems* 35, 38, 41-42, 54-55, 55-56).

95), this is the realm of “final integration” of which Merton speaks in his celebrated essay of that title,<sup>9</sup> reflecting on the psychotherapist Reza Arasteh’s Sufi-inspired articulation of genuine human maturity not as successful adaptation to social norms but as the full realization of one’s potential for self-transcendence (see 190-92). To conclude her presentation Gardner points out three “Epiphanies of the Child Mind,” as she entitles her final chapter (196-208): first his profound experience of “the innocence of childhood” in celebrating Mass shortly after his ordination, when he discovers himself as one who is “agelessly reborn” in his identification with the Eucharistic Christ: “every day I am a day old, and at the altar I am the Child Who is God” (201);<sup>10</sup> second the better known “epiphany” at Fourth and Walnut Streets in downtown Louisville (see 202-204),<sup>11</sup> when he recognizes in all the passersby the presence of Proverb, the figure of Wisdom from Proverbs, chapter 8 who is the child playing before the presence of God in creation and who is perceived “shining like the sun” in “le point vierge,” the virginal point, the “point of nothingness,” the poverty, the indigence, the total dependence of every human being on the graciousness of God the Creator and of Christ the divine and human brother and savior; and finally the recognition that “everything is emptiness and everything is compassion” that penetrates “beyond the shadow and the disguise” (*OSM* 323) at the shrine of Polonnaruwa (207), a clarity and simplicity in which Gardner recognizes the spiritual maturity of the authentic “child mind” that has recovered an experiential vision of wholeness from which nothing and no one is excluded. This, she implies in bringing this wise and luminous book to its conclusion, is Merton’s ultimate legacy, the gift not of the child mind itself, but of his testimonies to its ineffaceable presence and power at the very center of the self, the self born and reborn through and in the One who called his followers to become as little children and so to share fully in the reign of God.

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9. Thomas Merton, *Contemplation in a World of Action* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1971) 205-17.

10. Thomas Merton, *Entering the Silence: Becoming a Monk and Writer. Journals, vol. 2: 1941-1952*, ed. Jonathan Montaldo (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1996) 327 [6/19/1949]; occasionally, as here, the explicit connection of material to the theme of the child mind is left to the latter part of a discussion when it might be more effectively highlighted by using it at the beginning.

11. See the original journal entry for March 19, 1958 in Thomas Merton, *A Search for Solitude: Pursuing the Monk’s True Life. Journals, vol. 3: 1952-1960*, ed. Lawrence S. Cunningham (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1996) 181-82 and the revised version of the passage in *Conjectures* (140-42).