

to read Barth and identify with him in much the same way as he would read a Catholic author like Maritain” (*CGB* vi) these scholars and pastors have returned the favor by showing that Protestants can read Merton and identify with him to such an extent that their lives are forever changed. Published on the eve of the five hundredth anniversary of the Reformation, this book represents a step toward unity.

Ryan L. Scruggs

FOX, Matthew, *A Way to God: Thomas Merton's Creation Spirituality Journey* (Novato, CA: New World Library), pp. xiii + 308. ISBN 978-1-60868-421-2 (paper) \$18.95.

Matthew Fox was invited to speak at Bellarmine University in 2015 on the centennial anniversary of Merton's birth, which gave birth to the reflections in this book. The invitation proved to be more provocative for Fox than perhaps he recognized at first, for he re-discovered a kind of silent dialogue partner in Merton by realizing how closely their two paths had paralleled for decades. Fans of Fox's writings will not want to miss this book, for it is very much a hardy reflection on his own life's work. Merton readers may not learn anything new about Merton here, but they may experience another reader's joy in rediscovering a somewhat belated identification with Merton.

The book contains eleven chapters between an Introduction and a Conclusion. The Introduction is short but essential to understanding and appreciating the rationale of this work. Fox explains that, as he prepared for his talk in 2015, the “the closer [he] looked at Merton's journey,” the more “connections” and “intersections” he found between their lives and their writings (xii-xiii). The most interesting paragraph in these opening remarks is a confession: Fox tells of his resistance, for years, toward “over-associating [himself]” with what seemed to him to be a “veritable ‘Merton industry.’” He admits to shying away from “institutional power trips wherever [he] sensed them” as Fox “forged” his own “theological and spiritual way.” Certainly known as a popular maverick for years, Fox says he simply “felt the need to keep [his] distance a bit from the ‘Merton machine,’ which sometimes seemed to suck all the air out of the room” (xv). And then Fox opens the dam through which the rest of the book pours:

With this project, however, I feel a certain reconciliation – with Thomas himself, and with Merton scholars and the institutions Merton was closely related to, including both Bellarmine University, where Merton left many of his papers, and the Trappist Order within which

he lived his adult life. I praise Thomas for his fidelity to his vocation, and I praise his monastery for keeping his work alive and providing ever more resources from his rich legacy. (xv)

This book, therefore, represents Matthew Fox's exploration of his "roots and intersections" in Thomas Merton. The first three chapters provide the basis from which Fox moves on to reflect on the many ways that Merton can now be seen to have been so inspirational to him.

The first chapter outlines thematic "intersections" between Fox and Merton. We learn in the second chapter that Merton sent Fox a letter in early 1967, followed by a package of articles a short time later. The letter is presented in full and can also be found in the collection of Merton letters entitled *The School of Charity*.¹ This pivotal letter for Fox spurred him on his mystical journey and toward encounters with Bede Griffiths and deeper into a universal mysticism and creation spirituality. The third chapter positions Meister Eckhart front and center in this relational triad. Fox refers to Eckhart throughout the book as a mutual friend of both thinkers ("Merton's mentor and mine," he says later [254]), drawing inspiration from Eckhart to support both of their careers as spiritual explorers.

The remaining chapters, 4-11, focus on themes and concepts more common in Fox's own writings, such as the following: *via creativa*, *via transformativa*, the "heresies" of feminism and original blessing. Fox tends to focus on ways that he and Merton should be seen as co-rebels in their respective efforts to oppose rigid institutions, fundamentalist mentalities and the ongoing legacy of empire, particularly in chapters 9 and 10. The final chapter centers on Merton in relation to the Cosmic Christ and the action of love, which were also major themes in the works of Fox, particularly *The Coming of the Cosmic Christ* (1988) and *A Spirituality Named Compassion* (1979; rev. ed. 1999).

Fox's writing is light and fast-paced as he touches on as many points and problems as he can address across a lifetime of conflicts and struggles with established views. Fox definitely maintains his independence as a free thinker throughout the book, sometimes making claims that are more provocative than substantiated. For example, he claims that "Merton was the first religious figure in America to come out strongly against the Vietnam war" (140). In regard to the circumstances of Merton's death, Fox remains suspicious: "Perhaps we will never know whether or not Merton died a martyr at the hands of the American government. But it is very possible he did. I believe he did" (142).

1. Thomas Merton, *The School of Charity: Letters on Religious Renewal and Spiritual Direction*, ed. Patrick Hart (New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 1990) 327.

In the seventh and eighth chapters, Fox uses seven “heresies,” that he has been personally accused of, as subheadings to present and draw support from Merton’s credibility on these issues, chiefly centered on feminism, original blessing and original sin. Rightly or wrongly, the reader senses a slight self-defensive tone throughout the book as Fox finds Merton to be – as so many people do! – on *his* side of the balance.

Perhaps one learns more about Fox than Merton in this book, but it is an enjoyable romp through the last fifty years nevertheless. Perhaps this book could prompt other writers to take up Merton’s works in an exercise of self-examination as well as cultural reflection, to delve into Merton’s writings, after their own careers have been sculpted, to discover many likenesses in the art of living a living life. Whether we listen now or later, the chances are good that Merton will still be communicating with us in the years to come. Perhaps others who have kept their distance from a fearful “Merton machine” will learn as Matthew Fox did that Merton could never inspire noise and clamor, let alone exploitation.

Gray Matthews

DART, Ron, editor, *Thomas Merton and the Counterculture: A Golden String*, illustrations by Arnold Shives (Abbotsford, BC: St. Macrina Press, 2016), pp. xi + 125. ISBN 978-1423927883 (paper) \$20.00.

Ron Dart’s new collection, *Thomas Merton and the Counterculture: A Golden String*, accented with lively illustrations by Arnold Shives, explores Thomas Merton’s contributions as a countercultural figure alongside the literary Beats, as well as other literary figures of the counterculture including William Everson, Denise Levertov and Henry Miller. These essays add much-needed detail to an underdeveloped area of Merton studies and also will be of interest to students of the mid-century counterculture and the Beat Generation. In a little over one hundred pages, the volume’s contributors explore the ways in which outsider voices expressed discontent with American exceptionalism, the overweening American materialism of the 1950s and 1960s, and technological and scientific rationality.

Thomas Merton and the Counterculture develops its narrative in loosely chronological form. The first chapters situate the counterculture’s early development within New York City’s intellectual milieu, especially at that central site of elite and alternative literary culture: Columbia University. These central figures who, like Merton, were connected to Columbia University, range from the influential and progressive figure of Mark Van Doren, long-time professor at Columbia University, to Al-