of excerpts from his private and public writing and his largely spontaneous musings, provide a rare opportunity to encounter Merton "live" in his hermitage, engaging with critical issues at the point of intersection between a literary masterpiece and his own chosen way of life.

Patrick F. O'Connell

PARK, Jaechan Anselmo, *Thomas Merton's Encounter with Buddhism and Beyond: His Interreligious Dialogue, Inter-Monastic Exchanges, and Their Legacy*, Preface by Bonnie Thurston, Foreword by William Skudlarek (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2019), pp. xi + 285. ISBN 978-0-8146-8474-0 (paper) $29.95.

I keep a list of new books to read about Merton in my Amazon account. Father Jaechan Anselmo Park's *Thomas Merton's Encounter with Buddhism and Beyond* had been on it since it was published last year. I had every intention to read it, eventually. Some of my Merton friends had praised it and I knew it won the ITMS "Louie" Award at the most recent general meeting. Despite all that, I kept finding other Merton-related things to read because I was concerned that there wasn't much new ground to till when it came to the subject of Merton and his engagement with Eastern thought. Having finally read this wonderful book I am delighted to report that after more than 50 years of Merton scholarship it is still possible to bring fresh perspective to Merton and subjects that have already received much attention.

Park's work is a valuable addition to the subject of Merton and Buddhism. As a South Korean Benedictine priest and monk, he brings a fresh perspective to Merton's engagement with Eastern thought and his enduring legacy as a pioneer for inter-religious dialogue. Merton's writings had a profound impact on Park and he credits them for changing his academic, spiritual and monastic life. Near the end of his book Park describes reading about Merton's epiphany at the corner of Fourth and Walnut and being "suddenly overwhelmed with an ineffable light, and felt that Merton spoke to me: 'You love all people, and none of them could be totally alien to you. I love you not because you are a monk, but because you are my friend. I am only another member of the human race, and you are too!'" (255). He credits this experience for helping remove his "superior attitude" as a priest and monk, recognize his deep connection with God and gain a new understanding about human and monastic life.

Park uses Merton's contemplative life and experience as a kind of Rosetta Stone to better understand Merton and his exploration of Buddhism. For Merton, the starting point of contemplation was the discovery of the

true self and then, as Park describes, the "search for God not from outside the self but *inside* the self" (50). Park argues that Merton modernized the concept of contemplation in the West by promoting it for everyone, and believed that its widespread practice could become a common bond for people all over the world. Contemplation, in the life of a spiritually mature person, had the power to produce a state of being that transcended culture and religion and thus could establish "a spiritual family of human beings who were not separated by religious and cultural boundaries" (37).

Park also traces how religious experience transformed Merton's consciousness throughout every stage of his life. For example, Merton's systematic approach to contemplation underwent a transformation starting in the mid-1950s. In *The Inner Experience* Merton began to move from a systematic approach, emphasizing logic and rationality, to one rooted in contemplative experience which, quoting Merton, "is not arrived at through any step-by-step process. It is something you either 'see' or don't see. It just bursts upon you, and is there" (34). Park argues that Merton arrived at this understanding of contemplation through his experience of self-emptying in Christ and through his understanding of the Eastern traditions of his day.

Merton's attitude towards Buddhism, and other faiths, evolved over the course of his life. Early in his monastic life Merton believed Buddhism led to nihilism or heresy because of what he perceived to be a life-denying emphasis on self-emptying. However, this began to change in the mid-1950s as he became more interested in Zen. Merton's reading about Zen, and in particular the works of D. T. Suzuki, would lead him to consider new spiritual possibilities. Park notes that by 1959 Merton no longer regarded Buddhists in a negative light, now describing them "positively as friends and brothers" (66). This led to an even greater desire to understand and implement some of their practices during the last decade of his life.

Park is careful to point out that Merton did not see Zen as a competing religious system. Instead, since Zen does not deny or affirm a Supreme Being, Merton believed it could be fused into many theistic religions, or no religion at all. As he quotes Merton, Zen "can shine through this or that system, religious or irreligious, just as light can shine through glass that is blue, or green, or red, or yellow" (75). As such, Merton believed Zen could enhance the spiritual growth of Christians. In addition, Park points out that Merton's exploration of Buddhism, and Zen in particular, was encouraged by the Second Vatican Council's proclamation that truth could be found outside the Catholic Church. Finally, Park shows how Merton's discovery of a "Zen core" of experience in all great religions

helped him move from an intellectual approach to an experiential one when exploring other faiths. Father Park also credits this Buddhist influence for Merton's development of what he perceives to be a more nondualist outlook, renewed interest in other faiths and social justice issues.

Father Park also claims that this immersion in Zen Buddhism caused Merton to transcend his Western understanding of contemplation and construct a new, Buddhist–Christian one. He writes that Merton discovered a connection between the true self and the no-self of Buddhism and "realized that the notion of the no-self may become a bridge for connecting Christianity and Buddhism via the process of self-emptying or *kenosis*" (79). Finally, Park also points out that Merton believed that many of the teaching and practices of Buddhism could help Christians develop a deeper understanding of Christian contemplation, "in much the same way as the inspiration St. Thomas Aquinas acquired from Aristotelian philosophy led him to put forward some positions of Aristotle to help the church come to a deeper understanding of the Christian faith" (121).

Father Park completes his examination of Merton's journey into Buddhist thought with the actual Asian journey he took at the end of his life. Park describes that Merton "went to Asia looking not for artifacts but for living witnesses in ancient sources and then discovered spiritual brothers and mentors in Asia" (118). He highlights Merton's meetings with the practitioners of various Buddhist traditions, including the Dalai Lama. Park describes how Merton approached these encounters as both a student of their traditions as well as a fellow monk seeking to engage in inter-monastic dialogue. In this way, Park argues Merton created a new paradigm for interreligious dialogue by means of inter-monastic exchange and inter-contemplative dialogue. At times Father Park seems to overstate the impact of Merton's relatively brief encounter with some of the Tibetan Buddhists he met, e.g.: "Through his encounter with Tibetan Buddhists, Merton opened 'the door of emptiness without sign and wish' and attained a new and profound spiritual view that synthesized elements of Buddhist and Christian monasticism" (89). While Merton did enthuse about many of these encounters in his journal, there was unfortunately not enough time afterwards for him to process and reflect upon these meetings or for us to evaluate how they affected his life. Finally, Park finishes this portion of Merton's life by describing the famous awakening he experienced visiting the Buddha statues at Polonnaruwa.

Park also examines how Merton influenced subsequent interreligious dialogue and offers suggestions for future contact between Christians and Buddhists. First, he shows how Merton was a true pioneer of Christian–Buddhist dialogue. Park argues that Merton was one of the first contempla-

tive monks to be able to speak of the self and God in terms recognizable to Buddhists. Park shows how the concepts and language of Zen allowed him to express his own religious experience in a way that was beyond the concepts of Greek philosophy and Western thought and argues, "I am convinced that he discovered the *contemplative core* of future inter-religious dialogue through the lens of Zen" (254). He goes on to write that Zen led Merton to see that "although religions may understand the experience of contemplation or enlightenment differently . . . their primary objective is to bring about ultimate self-transcendence of expressing it" (254). Park contends that Merton's key contribution to inter-monastic and contemplative dialogue was his emphasis on sharing contemplative experiences and monastic life with other religious traditions.

Park goes on to show how different groups have directly and indirectly used Merton as a model for ongoing Christian–Buddhist dialogue. He argues that Merton indirectly influenced members of the Christian Monastic Interreligious Dialogue group in their work with Buddhists and Hindus. Their monastic exchange program is reminiscent of Merton's visit to Asia where he sought to spend time with practitioners of different faiths. In addition, a series of Gethsemani Encounters has been established, explicitly using Merton as their model for continued sharing between Buddhists and Christians. Beginning in 1996 Buddhist contemplatives and lay people have gathered with their Christian counterparts four times at Gethsemani to reflect upon and discuss a number of topics of global concern. These are tangible examples of Merton's enduring legacy of interreligious dialogue.

Father Park concludes his book with suggestions for maintaining and enhancing Buddhist–Christian dialogue. He argues that for interreligious dialogue to truly be authentic it must be accompanied by intra-religious dialogue. This is a process in which one assimilates elements from a different faith into one's own spiritual life, resulting in "a profound inner transformation" (220) that has the power to produce new insights that can "create a new dimension of spirituality between different religious traditions and in one's inner self, as well as in one's own spiritual tradition" (221). Park is careful to recommend this kind of spiritual dialogue only to those who have attained spiritual maturity in their own faith, lest it challenge and weaken it.

Father Park's book is well researched, organized and written. He provides a concise conclusion section in each chapter, taking the opportunity to reiterate the key points he is attempting to convey. His own monastic perspective, and specifically his focus on contemplation, is a welcome one and provides a fresh take on material already covered by a variety

of scholars. Those of us with a passion for Merton have a personal story about how he impacted our lives and I'm glad Father Park shared his own. This book breaks new ground in its detailed description of how Merton influenced subsequent interreligious dialogue and this element helps set it apart from other writings about Merton's interest in Buddhism.

David Orberson

SAVASTANO, Peter, ed., *Merton and Indigenous Wisdom* (Louisville, KY: Fons Vitae, 2019), pp. xx + 282. ISBN: 978-18917-859-93 (paper) $29.95.

Thomas Merton was often on the cutting edge of movements in culture and religion during his time. His wide range of interests and writings tempt us, at least to some extent, to read Merton into our own image. Merton was becoming aware of the plight of indigenous people in a post-colonial world with its cultural genocide and ignorance of the value of their spirituality. But his untimely death prevented him from advocating more for their concerns or exploring the topic more extensively. This book is an effort to bring the few and sparse contributions that Merton did make to the topic of indigenous wisdom and is expanded into a single volume.

In his Introduction to the book, Peter Savastano raises the question of the status of homosexuality among the religions of the world (see xviii). While it is likely that if Merton had lived longer, he would have come to the same conclusions that Pope Francis did in the recent movie-biography *Francesco*, where he advocated for civil union protections for homosexuals. But to introduce this issue into a volume on Merton and Indigenous Wisdom appears out of context. For unlike John Henry Newman, the question of Merton's sexual orientation has not been raised due in large part to his well-documented encounters with women. But that aside, the Introduction does not introduce the individual essays, and so does not give the scope and parameters for the collection. That said, there are some rich selections in this volume.

The first essay (1-19), an excerpt from Vine Deloria, Jr.'s classic *God Is Red* sets the tone for a paradigmatic post-colonial discourse and likewise provides a basis for affirming and critiquing Merton's approach to indigenous spirituality.

The second and third essays explore Merton's relationship with "Native America." Lewis Mehl-Madrona and Barbara Mainguy write from a Lakota perspective. In the second essay (21-42) they acknowledge that Merton, like others such as Achiel Peelman, have moved the Roman Catholic Church towards more positive views of Indigenous religions and practices. (I would add to the list the late Carl Starkloff, SJ (1933-2007),