

Though Merton did not quite seem to fit in the Trappists and Berrigan does not quite seem to fit in the Jesuits, they both seemed to know they fit better in their orders than anywhere else. Ross Labrie appreciates the Quixotic mixture of poet and activist that is Berrigan. He likes Berrigan's unpredictable acts and takes him seriously as a writer. His literary reflections on Berrigan are perceptive and well considered. Labrie has a ready familiarity with the thirty books Berrigan has written and charts their development. It would not be appropriate that a book on Berrigan be dull, and the present book has met the challenge.

QUIXOTIC MERTON

Review of

Thomas M. King

ENCHANTMENTS:

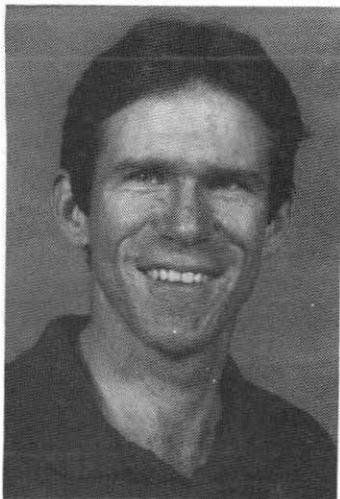
RELIGION AND THE POWER OF THE WORD

Kansas City, Missouri: Sheed & Ward, 1989

xiv, 232 pages / \$14.95 paperback

Reviewed by **Bill Koch**

I suspect that Thomas King's *Enchantments: Religion and the Power of the Word* is informed largely by his experiences conducting the "retreats and other pastoral programs" that are alluded to in the biographical note on the back cover of this work. Although a scholarly book, *Enchantments* is imbued with a pastoral, caring tone. The repetition of key phrases during the development of certain ideas also reminds one of a retreat talk. This tone and method contribute to the purpose of King's study, which seeks to find a creative balance between the tensions of various dualities in the religious experience of humanity: ethics and spirituality, experience and authority, the passing world and the enduring Word. King holds a special sympathy for



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those victimized by cults — he understands their need to believe the “word” of illumination, but he also respects the concreteness of the world that cults reject and curse. His contribution to these conflicts is his acceptance of both sides.

The first of four chapters explores the world of the literalist, beginning with the “archetype” of those who surrender to verbal enchantments — Don Quixote. In demonstrating the power of stories and words, King effectively draws upon analogies from life, such as hypnotism and geometry. Quixote, drawn into a world of chivalry by what he read, entered a world of pure form. This world of principles and absolutes gave him a code of ethics by which to judge the world. But his ideals also blinded him to the consequences of his idealistic behavior.

King points out that Quixote represents the consequences of reading that most people experience. His observations are keen and interesting:

Some people find the strongest emotions they experience occur while they were alone with a book. Books have changed society, not only by what they said, but in the very fact that they allow an individual to withdraw from others into a private world. (p. 8)

The life of Thomas Merton is reviewed in chapter two, where King discusses the plight of the idealist (or literalist) who, after a time of rigid discipline and adherence to an ethic, finds him or herself confused by radically different, internal impulses. Along with the examples of Ignatius of Loyola, Job, and Faust, Merton’s life is presented as the integration of a spirituality with an ethic. King explains the difference between ethics and spirituality in what I think is a key section of the book:

A spirituality, any spirituality, could be defined as a way of dealing with the moods, urges and impulses that act on their own apart from the intent of the will. It is different from an ethic, for an ethic is an objective code and ignores how one feels, while a spirituality takes account of the very feelings that an ethic ignores. An ethic is concerned with the deeds one intends and for which one is responsible. While, in contrast, a spirituality is concerned with the inner life, a life which seems to go its own way apart from one’s intent and for which one is not directly responsible. (p. 55)

Merton is depicted as a “knight-errant” who, upon his conversion to Catholicism and subsequent entrance into the Cistercians, was totally enchanted by God’s Word. King supplies a wealth of quotations pertinent to this point. One understands better the nature of Merton’s writer’s block during “the hidden years.” Chanting the Word in choir, and living as a “listener” of the Word, enabled Merton to “rest in Eden,” which he took to be the purpose of monastic life. King notes: “As a *monk* his task was to lose himself in the given word, but as a writer he must do the reverse: disengage himself from what he was told and make original judgments” (p. 78).

Merton’s innocent enchantment with the monastic ethic was ending, to be replaced by a *Merton* spirituality grounded in monasticism, yet paradoxically appropriate for the modern context of a global village. King quotes the key Merton assertion: “Zen and Christianity are the future” (p. 83). King explains:

Christianity (as doctrine and morals) draws one apart from experience and into an ideal; while Zen is the recovery of experience. Merton came to rediscover his experience and was surprised by the “ultimate and humble discovery of inner freedom” — a freedom apart from any Rule. (p. 83)

Merton’s insomnia, his wrestling with his writer’s shadow and writer’s block are interpreted by King as symptoms of the sensual side of Merton’s personality seeking a valid recognition and integration into his idealism. In finding his own writing voice, Merton learned he had to abandon the pious clichés and “incantations of familiar sentences” for personal, direct observation and naming of “the naked spiritual realities inside.” The verbal spell was broken, King states, but this allowed Merton to speak with fresh and personal images, to see the validity of a monastic

perspective on social issues and to become even, if you will, “enchanted” with Zen. King makes an interesting judgment on Merton’s later writings that were influenced by Zen:

In writing Zen prose one does not think; one records the sights and sounds but does not judge. Merton was amazed by experience and the “naked spiritual realities inside.” He tried to write of these with ever-greater accuracy and record insignificant data in photographs taken by his “zen camera” — it only recorded what was there. But in the process, many of his monastic and Christian friends . . . believed he broke so free of his past that something had been lost. I am among these.

(p. 87)

Merton probably wouldn’t argue the point, and I think he could point to some effective Zen passages dealing with nature in *Conjectures of a Guilty Bystander* and *The Geography of Lograire*. In any case, King’s point is valid: “Zen offers its own possibility of poor prose” (P. 88).

King offers a fruitful discussion on the life of Jesus in chapter three, especially concerning his temptations in the desert. King notes how Jesus successfully moved from an enchantment with the word and its idealized ethic to an integration of both the ethical standard and the world of “mortals in distress.”

Like Don Quixote Jesus will live by the word, but by the second baptism he had something that Quixote did not: compassion, a feel for humans in their weakness . . . Jesus also identified with the higher world found in his books, and from that world assisted mortals in distress. But he was part of the present world: he knew its hungers, felt its insults, and wept over the death of a friend. (p. 121)

Jesus’ acceptance of his humanity was evident in his language, King points out. Jesus spoke in fresh and vivid images taken from the world. In contrast to the early Merton, Jesus did not rely on the clichés of his religious milieu, but found original expressions from his own life experiences.

The final chapter discusses the resolution of Word and world in the lives and writings of Merton, Socrates, and St. Paul. The “either-or” duality in Merton’s early writings was resolved into a dialogue between the Revelation of God’s Word and the world-destined-for-redemption. This dialogue was represented by the use of the term “meditation” in place of “contemplation”:

Contemplation was said to be a pure *listening* to God; as such it could not be a dialogue . . . But meditation is a dialogue . . . In meditation the world cannot disappear, for meditation occurs in the context of the earthly and historical circumstances of one’s life. Contemplation draws one apart from the historical world, but meditation gives one an understanding of history. (p. 154)

It is within this discussion of Merton that King makes an important pastoral point, an insight that serious secular Christians can find helpful. While contemplation is an ideal form of prayer, “it is not love; it is only enchantment. It becomes love only after one falls back from Paradise and once again stands (with at least one foot) in the familiar and dreary world of one’s self . . . The enchantment of the honeymoon is over, but that does not mean the end of the marriage” (p. 158). Indeed, I would suggest that one would find a wealth of compassion in one’s own heart. As Merton so richly described his own experience in *Cables to the Ace* (# 72): “My own center is the teeming heart of natural families.”

I cannot do justice to the cornucopia of material that King is able to handle in this book. Besides lengthy expositions of Quixote, Job, Socrates, Ignatius, Paul and Merton, there are interesting discussions on Orphism, the Conquistadors, *The Cloud of Unknowing*, *The Spiritual Exercises*, Kierkegaard and other things. In terms of problems, and these are in the nature of typographical errors, I would only note that the abbreviation for *Contemplation in a World of Action*, “CWA,” is given as “CAW” on the pages where it is quoted (pp. 153-154), and in the final reference to “Aseitas,” a theological term important to Merton, the word “Ipseitas” is used for the first time (p. 194).

But these are only minor points. King is to be congratulated for writing a well-constructed and tightly-woven work. He is even thoughtful enough to include a short, concise summary of chapters after the Table of Contents. He wants the reader of his book to know where he or she has been and is going. One then finds oneself enchanted with this profound, timely human journey and able to wrestle with the enchantment. One sees the power of an objective ethic, the need for a personal spirituality, and the possibility of responding to the problems (mysteries) of the moment with a personal creativity born of the Spirit of love.

MERTON: SPARKED BY THE MEISTER

Review of

Terry Tastard

THE SPARK IN THE SOUL: SPIRITUALITY AND SOCIAL JUSTICE

Foreword by Michael Hollings

London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1989

xii, 124 pages / £5.95 paperback

Reviewed by **Erlinda G. Paguio**

Confronted by critical problems such as acid rain, nuclear fall out, enormous debts owed by third world countries to northern hemisphere bankers, underfunding of social services, poverty, etc., Terry Tastard raises the question of the role of spirituality in our task of making this world a better place in which to live. Although he believes that Christians should be active in social concern, he argues against a commitment that is compelled by guilt. He recommends an involvement that arises freely from within. He uses the analogy of the tiny spark in a car's engine to illustrate his point. Just as this tiny spark gives more power and efficiency than ten people pushing the car, a prayerful, loving knowledge of God and His love for the world is a better and more effective motivation in the struggle for social change than guilt is.

The author, a former journalist in South Africa and now a member of the Anglican Society of Saint Francis, works with social justice groups. He also teaches spirituality at the Institute of Christian Studies and other centers in London. In his attempt to integrate spirituality with social action, he draws from the life and teachings of four great mystics: St. Francis of Assisi (ca. 1181-1226), Meister Eckhart (ca. 1260-1327), Evelyn Underhill (1875-1941), and Thomas Merton (1915-1968). Each of them in their own unique way expressed a genuine spirituality which Tastard calls "kairologically present." Their love for God and their union with Him also embraced a love for the people and the world around them. Their love empowered them to be present to the

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