

## Coming Home in Time and Eternity

Review of

### *Choosing to Love the World: On Contemplation*

By Thomas Merton

Edited by Jonathan Montaldo

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Reviewed by **Meghan J. Robinson**

Jonathan Montaldo carefully and creatively arranges Thomas Merton's insights in *Choosing to Love the World* in a manner that not only allows readers to enter into Merton's heart and mind, but guides them into their own as well. Montaldo is brilliant in his precision in selecting passages from myriad works offering readers selections that lead to the core of the contemplative lifestyle. The only way better to enter into this depth of understanding is through contemplation itself.

The reading of this book is a spiritual journey. Its purpose is not solely to stimulate the intellect, but to excite one into prayer, into the innermost depths of a relationship with the One who has sought us first. Montaldo divides the book into sections with titles such as "The Inner Ground of Love," "Living In Wisdom," "Dialoguing with Silence," and "A Monastic Life of Prayer and Protest," evoking within the readers some of the central themes Thomas Merton expressed throughout his life. The division of the book into sections creates a marvelously developing thematic unity, a cohesiveness, by which one can read the book from beginning to end, taking part in a retreat. Each page contains a short reflection from Merton, transitioning smoothly to the next, as we find Merton reflecting on similar themes through the lenses of varying experiences at different moments in his life. Even with this fluidity, the book can still easily lend itself to a reader who is more inclined to move freely around, reading the reflections in any order.

Whatever Merton is addressing in the excerpts, it arises from a contemplative heart, from one who is aware of Who is at the center of his being. What readers see emerge is how a life grounded in God through contemplation is the foundation for recovering and realizing one's identity in Christ. Through solitude, in the spaces between words and thoughts, in the silent growth of nature, Merton gives us a glimpse of where to encounter the Hidden One. And through this encounter, "We discover an older unity. . . . we are already one" (168).

Montaldo masterfully intersperses passages demonstrating Merton's call to love the world

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**Meghan J. Robinson** is a youth minister and organist for two Catholic parishes in the Rochester, NY Diocese. She has a bachelor's degree in music education from Nazareth College of Rochester and is currently enrolled in the Master's of Divinity program at St. Bernard's School of Theology and Ministry.

instead of forsaking it, to discover his own possibilities and choices, not having to pay heed to a forced choice of exclusively abandoning the world or solely living a secular lifestyle. In describing his lifestyle Merton explains: “[it] must provide an area, a space of liberty, of silence, in which possibilities are allowed to surface and new choices – beyond routine choice – become manifest” (60). This freedom from forced choices ignites a transformation in the social attitude of Merton. Montaldo chooses excerpts which capture Merton’s passion, dedication, and sense of responsibility as a human. Through these we come to know Merton, the man who is a contemporary of some of the most abhorrent atrocities humankind can commit and endure. We learn about the Merton who refuses to escape, to be a bystander, to ignore this senseless evil and destruction.

As one journeys through the book, one will discover a most precious invitation – a call for us to get to know ourselves. Wisdom shines forth from Merton as he shares: “Therefore, most honorable reader, it is not as an author that I would speak to you, not as a storyteller, not as a philosopher, not as a friend only: I seek to speak to you, in some way, as your own self. . . . [I]f you listen, things will be said that are perhaps not written in this book” (75). Merton’s words are the instruments through which the gentle breeze finds its voice. As we take the time to rest in between these words, we may begin to feel called to empty ourselves, allowing the gentle breeze inside.

This book is not reserved solely for those who are well-versed in Merton. On the contrary, it’s for anyone who dares to listen and be, to enter into communion with God, one’s self, and humanity. It is for the part in each and every one of us that aches, that yearns, and that desires to come home again and again. It is then we can proclaim: “Although [we are] traveler[s] in time, [we have] opened [our] eyes, for a moment, in eternity” (112).