

Drawn through Love

Review of

It Draws Me: The Art of Contemplation

By Mary M. McDonald

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Reviewed by **Mary Louise Heffernan, SSJ**

In *It Draws Me: The Art of Contemplation*, Mary M. McDonald draws on the monastic way of seeing through word, writing and seeing. The book consists of an Introduction which explores the heritage of *lectio divina*, the heritage of icons, the heritage of Song Dynasty landscape paintings, and instruction in how to use this book. The four sections are: (1) “The *Lectio*-Inspired Prose of Thomas Merton”; (2) “Icons as Writing the Word”; (3) “A World in a Drop of Ink”; (4) “What Monastic Contemplative Artists Want to Give Us.” In her preface, the author speaks of the influence of Bernard Lonergan, the talented Jesuit theologian of the twentieth century, and of Margaret Miles, the art critic who believed that if people had insight into some important aspect of their lives, they were more able to live out that knowledge if they had a model or an image to bolster it.

Merton in numerous writings engages deeper insights into contemplative prayer. *Lectio divina*, a dynamic style of monastic prayer through reflection on scripture, always brings us to wisdom and wholeness through insight and “living in God,” not just “knowledge of God.”

The unpublished lecture notes of Merton on *lectio divina* point to the “need for the desire” to grow spiritually and live with a strong personal conviction to give oneself to God – difficult concepts as we live in a milieu of practicability and efficiency. We need desperately to cultivate wholeness, taking time to be with the Word, an icon and or an artistic rendering, letting its beauty and depth bring us to the revelation and love of God.

Merton himself turned to brushwork calligraphies calling him into his “Center,” where he satiated his desire for oneness with God. It is here that he rested, listened, and was united. Moving inward creates space to let the beauty radiate into every fiber and action.

It Draws Me: The Art of Contemplation is an entrance way into *lectio divina*. I hope it inspires a desire in readers to open the door of their heart into the ancient practice that brings us to wisdom and love. The icons and renderings of the Song Dynasty are well-presented and inspiring.

While Merton’s works are referenced in several places, I kept hoping that there would be a section devoted to his brushwork calligraphies and the peacefulness experienced within himself as he developed this art form in his own prayer.

Mary Louise Heffernan, SSJ is actively involved in Spirituality Ministry and is Director for Mission Integration for the Sisters of Saint Joseph of Rochester, NY. Her interest in Thomas Merton has been greatly influenced by Monsignor William H. Shannon. Her 2011 ITMS workshop, “Another Door to Contemplation,” offered insights into Merton’s brushwork calligraphies.