

“Very encouraging” (180) he has little more to say about it, and is clearly more fascinated, as Hudson notes, with his other purchase on the same day, John Coltrane’s *Ascension*, a revolutionary jazz recording that he described as “shattering. A fantastic and prophetic piece of music” (180), a sign of renewed interest in the musical genre that had most captivated him in the years immediately before entering the monastery. Had his own life not been cut tragically short he may well have continued to follow Dylan’s various reinventions of himself and his music, but at least as of 1968 this phase of his encounter with popular culture had come, if not to a definitive conclusion, to what turned out to be a permanent pause.

In his closing Acknowledgements, Hudson thanks his wife for the suggestion “that what started as a breezy article might be turned into a serious book” (197). One might wonder if, given Hudson’s relative lack of familiarity with other aspects of Merton’s life, his research on Merton and Dylan would have been better presented in an article, breezy or otherwise, rather than in a full-scale book. Despite its numerous incidental flaws, the book was the right choice. The broader scope afforded by its greater length allows the author to situate Merton’s encounter with Dylan in the context of the overall arc of each of their lives and of their times. Not only is Dylan’s importance to Merton made clear, but seeing Dylan through Merton’s eyes provides an intriguing and enlightening perspective on Dylan himself as well, as fellow prophet and fellow pilgrim. As Hudson suggests in his brief Epilogue (192-96), these two figures are most vividly present in “our cultural mind’s eye” in that brief period, “that critical, chaotic time,” when their respective journeys came closest to convergence. “‘Bringing it all back home’ meant something different to each of them. But it is to our benefit that these two men, artists of very different kinds, had enough vision to seek out that ideal home in the first place and, when they grew disenchanted with it, enough wisdom to keep on looking” (195). Hudson’s engaging and enjoyable account makes it possible for the reader to accompany these inspired, and inspiring, seekers on this common quest.

Patrick F. O’Connell

ORBERSON, David E. *Thomas Merton: Evil and Why We Suffer – From Purified Soul Theodicy to Zen* (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2018), pp. xiv + 127. ISBN 978-1-5326-3899-2 (paper) \$19.00.

Scholars continue to assess the influence of non-Christian religious traditions on Thomas Merton’s life and thought. Inter-monastic and inter-religious dialogue were significant features in many of Merton’s later

works. Furthermore, Merton's engagement with non-Christian worldviews generated perspectives on key religious issues that remain relevant in our contemporary world. *Thomas Merton: Evil and Why We Suffer* recognizes the extent to which non-Christian works and thinkers shaped Merton's distinct contribution to the persistent question of theodicy.

The question was an omnipresent one for Merton, given his own personal experiences with physical, emotional and spiritual suffering; for this very reason, the question was also a complex one. It is all the more telling then that theodicy is an underrepresented topic in studies of Merton and his thought. *Thomas Merton: Evil and Why We Suffer* disentangles the disparate experiences, writings and thinkers that informed Merton's theodicy in order to approach the question systematically. By considering Merton's ideas about theodicy across his works, the author intends to survey "each instance where he does address this topic throughout his entire canon" (xiii). This approach offers readers an opportunity to witness Merton as a thinker in action, that is, to identify shifts and transitions in his thought alongside life events and/or changes in circumstances. This careful attention to approach bears fruit in a clear, accessible and persuasive argument that demonstrates efficiently how Merton's own consideration of the question of theodicy evolved over the course of his monastic life and practice. According to the author, Merton's early emphasis on the purgative (or purifying) role of suffering would transition to a later view that "included an admonition against using logic, intellectualization, or even words to confront the problem of evil" (117). Merton's shifting accentuation toward a non-dualist approach to the question of theodicy intersects directly with his increased exposure to Zen Buddhism in the last few years of his life.

The book has a concise structure beginning with a short preface (xi-xiv) that raises the question, lays out the approach, and presents a summary of the argument. Chapter one (1-29) attends to Merton's biography with particular focus on those events that present physical, emotional or spiritual suffering. The effects are qualitative and quantitative: the reader encounters Merton as a fellow human being whose extensive experiences with suffering, in its individual and collective forms, raise common existential concerns with the goodness of God and the presence of evil. The chapter illustrates that Merton's questions about theodicy emerge from a consistent encounter with suffering. Whereas readers of Merton may know already of many of these events, their chronological presentation around the theme of suffering provides a fresh orientation. By foregrounding Merton's own experience with suffering, the author highlights that the question of theodicy originates in experience that

beckons an intellectual response.

Chapter two (30-51) then provides a review of common responses to the question of theodicy. Specific attention is given to those theories about the question of theodicy operative to the study of Merton's views. Here, the author presents basic synopses of free will theodicy, soul-making theodicy, process theodicy and cruciform theodicy; his discussion is rightly oriented toward readers unfamiliar with Christian theological concepts. The chapter closes with a brief treatment of how evil and suffering are interpreted in the Zen Buddhist tradition. The purpose is explanatory as the author contends: "A good theodicy is one that provides a path for approaching the problem of evil. It should not be thought of as a way to discover a definitive or conclusive answer to it" (51).

This observation transitions appropriately to Merton's approach to the question of theodicy discussed in the third and fourth chapters. In these chapters, the author employs the tri-partite division used by Merton himself in reference to his writings (see 59-60). Merton's theodicy in the period from 1938-1963, covering the first two periods of this division including his conversion to Catholicism, his monastic formation and development as a Cistercian, and his intentional intellectual exposure to non-Christian religious and other philosophical worldviews, is the focus of the third chapter (52-77). The chapter addresses the influence of an Augustinian view and features discussion of evil in relation to Nazism, the Holocaust and the assassination of President Kennedy. The last of these includes material transcribed from one of Merton's monastic conferences. Merton's conferences were often sites for dialogical instruction; this particular transcription contains a fascinating exchange around the topic of what God wills and what God permits (see 72-74). By including this archival material, the author illustrates how Merton grappled intensely with variant responses to the question of theodicy.

Chapter four (78-114), covering the period from 1964-1968, examines how Merton's deepening understanding of concepts in Zen Buddhism, as learned through the thought of D. T. Suzuki, contributes to a shift in his views whereby "he increasingly refused to try to give any explanation as to how and why suffering can exist in a universe with a God who is all-powerful and all-loving" (78). The chapter is a succinct presentation of circumstantial and direct evidence for this shift. In the process, Orberon necessarily attends to Merton's writings and interests in this period with emphasis on his engagement with the thought of Czeslaw Milosz, Albert Camus, Martin Luther King, Jr., Mahatma Gandhi and D. T. Suzuki. Of particular insight is the author's discussion of the ways Merton sought resonances between Camus' rendering of evil and the non-binary response

espoused in Zen Buddhism. The book's conclusion (115-18) hearkens to Merton's pursuit of action, especially in response to "the humanly caused evils of alienation and hatred that lead to suffering, in order to usher in Christ's promised kingdom of God here and now" (118). The book includes a brief bibliography (119-24) and subject index (125-27).

Thomas Merton: Evil and Why We Suffer offers a provocative and compelling study of how Merton confronted one of the most pressing existential questions. The fact that Merton struggled with the question of theodicy on several levels over the course of his entire life, and that he weighed a wide range of responses from an array of religious and non-religious thinkers makes him an ideal conversation partner for our time.

Bernadette McNary-Zak

TURLEY, Hugh and David Martin, *The Martyrdom of Thomas Merton: An Investigation* (Hyattsville, MD: McCabe Publishing, 2018), pp. viii +309. ISBN: 978-1-54807-738-9 (paper) \$17.99.

Journalists Hugh Turley and David Martin are not investigative journalists of the stature of Bob Woodward and Carl Bernstein and they did not have the resources or the backing the latter had when they wrote their exposés of political skullduggery and ethical malfeasance. But they do benefit from the pioneering work of Seymour Hersh, whose 1974 disclosure of CIA spying practices on antiwar activists provides some underpinning to their central thesis in *The Martyrdom of Thomas Merton*.

To be clear, this work – subtitled "An Investigation" – is built on some intrepid research, acquiring official documents, deploying several sources – private and public – in their effort to explore the strange circumstances of Merton's death. They are nothing if not dogged. But they are also overly zealous in their claims, unfazed by the damage they inflict on reputations, unswerving in their conviction that Merton's death is not what it has been purported to be, and oracular in their stance. Once persuaded that Merton perished as a consequence of his profile as a spiritual prophet and as a critic of American defense policies and fears, they leave no stone unturned in their determination to establish the diabolical collusions behind the storied monk's storied death. We live in a time when conspiracy theories are incubated and then released upon a credulous public with distressing regularity. Breitbart is the new *zeitgeist*. *The Martyrdom of Thomas Merton* is but one iteration of this pathology.

This is not to say that there is nothing in the Turley/Martin book that is of any value, even if contestable. There are many things they surface in their probings that merit consideration: their serious exploration around