

earlier Christian and monastic writers.

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MERTON, Thomas, *Compassionate Fire: The Letters of Thomas Merton and Catherine de Hueck Doherty*, edited with an Introduction and Afterword by Robert A. Wild (Notre Dame, IN: Ave Maria Press, 2009), pp. xiv + 110. ISBN 9781594712166 (paper) \$12.95.

Perhaps a key to Thomas Merton's enduring fame is that he provides a window to a soul's spiritual development, that as a spiritual seeker he was in constant development and was honest about the struggles he experienced. Likewise, Merton's correspondence with Catherine de Hueck Doherty provides us Merton's candid autobiography in miniature from his pre-monastic vocational discernment in New York, through his highs and lows as a Trappist monk, to his transition to living as a hermit at Gethsemani. Having begun her correspondence with Merton at a comparatively older age (19 years Merton's senior), Doherty's style of writing changes less through the progress of their letters than does Merton's, but she relates similar changes in her state of life.

Doherty's journey progresses from Friendship House in Harlem, to Madonna House in rural Ontario, to the solitary life at her *Poustinia* (an eremitic style of life from the Russian Orthodox tradition brought by Doherty to Catholic spirituality). At times their tangents seem to be parallel, but in some regards they represent a perpendicular crossing. Both experienced mixed feelings about the vocation of writing, and both struggled at times with community life and with religious leaders and superiors. Merton's correspondence begins as a young man wondering whether he should embrace a vocation of lay service in Harlem at Friendship House or become a Trappist contemplative. Oddly, his inclination to join the Trappists was rekindled by listening to a retreat conference at Friendship House extolling lay "Catholic Action" by Doherty's spiritual director Fr. Paul Hanly Furfey (22, 106). He joins the Trappists and finds himself engaging more and more with the world in the 1950s and '60s, including the advancement of Civil Rights for many African Americans he could have served had he remained in Harlem. Although Doherty was a champion of lay service to the poor and racial justice through direct action, she chose to move to a rural setting, founded a lay apostolate with some quasi-monastic rules, mutually agreed with her husband Ed-

die to live celibately after twelve years of marriage, and pioneered an eremitic life before Merton and many other Western monks achieved this goal. Both had other influences leading them to a nexus of interests, but it is not too much of a stretch to say that their friendship was an ongoing challenge to each other and may have been part of a creative tension that inspired each to simultaneously integrate social involvement and solitary contemplation.

In his Afterword, editor Robert Wild analyses Catherine de Hueck Doherty's influence on Merton. He cites Merton's introduction to *The Secular Journal*: "I owe much to Catherine" (96). He quotes Dr. Paul Pearson of the Thomas Merton Center in suggesting that Merton viewed her as "one of his 'spiritual parents'" (97). Wild notes Catherine's letter of February 17, 1958, in which she frames the dynamics of their relationship in terms of mother-son, sister-brother, and even father-daughter. Wild explains that in the last case, "The age of a priest meant little to Catherine. Her strong faith saw every priest as Father" (98). At the same time, Merton and Doherty could go long periods without writing to one another but through the various changes in their lives could find in the other someone in whom to trust. On both sides there is admiration and trust, but neither do we find a sense of dependence, obligation or reliance. Each was a sounding board for the other, but immediate reply or constant contact was not necessary. Wild recognizes this influence without overstating it.

One disappointment in Wild's editing was inclusion of the abridged versions of Merton's letters from William Shannon's *The Hidden Ground of Love* (Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1985). In a slim volume like this, the inclusion of the full letters would still provide a manageable length while making it more of a definitive collection and more attractive to those who already own Shannon's volume. Doherty's letters to Merton appear for the first time and are unabridged. In the larger volumes of Merton's letters to a number of correspondents, the exclusion of some trivial sections makes sense for an economy of space. However, in the mind of the scholar interested in the totality of the correspondence between Merton and, in this case, Doherty, small gaps become wide chasms. One becomes suspicious that hidden in the ellipses is that rare gem of a reference.

In a cursory review of the copies of Merton's original letters held at the Merton Center, I find that most of the editorial excisions would not be (to another biased eye) of much interest to the reader.

The exclusions I found most difficult to justify occur in some of the early correspondence. At this critical period before entering Gethsemani, when Merton was engaged in vocational discernment, a period with less documentation than in his later life, sections are missing regarding: his justification of a monastic vocation, his fears about living in Harlem, and descriptions of some nightmares which make Doherty's response to them seem out of context.

Overall, this is a fine collection of letters that will interest fans of Merton and Doherty. Their friendship, as demonstrated in these letters, shaped one another's lives and elucidates each other's struggles. The scholar of either of the correspondents may still feel the need to return to the original letters, which is unfortunate. However, the struggle of balancing contemplative prayer and social commitment comes through in the correspondence. It will make a fine addition to collections about Doherty and Merton.

Mark C. Meade

A Meeting of Angels: The Correspondence of Thomas Merton with Edward Deming & Faith Andrews, edited with an Introduction by Paul M. Pearson (Frankfort, KY: Broadstone Books, 2008), pp. 118. ISBN 978-0-9721144-9-3 (cloth) \$25.00.

This small, beautifully printed volume contains a good deal more than the correspondence of Thomas Merton and the Andrewses. The short introduction is followed by four sections: 21 letters between Merton and Edward Deming Andrews, 6 letters between Merton and Faith Andrews, Merton's photographs of the Shaker Village of Pleasant Hill, and an appendix reprinting an old review by Ananda K. Coomaraswamy of the Andrewses' ground-breaking book, *Shaker Furniture*. The twenty-seven letters were written between 1961 and 1965, during which time the correspondents met only once.

The photos, while not distinguished as photographic art, reveal Merton's appreciation of the kind of stark beauty of Shaker buildings and landscape that attracted the "Precisionist" artist Charles Sheeler and photographers like William Winter. The Coomaraswamy review, while very well done, seems tacked on. It is worth pointing out that both Merton, the Catholic monastic, and Coomaraswamy, the Hindu guru and philosopher, became friends of the Andrewses as a result of their mutual admiration of the spiritual life of the Shakers and Ted Andrews' mastery of

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