

the development of his ideas over a period of years (see for example pages xlvi, li). I found O'Connell's insights into Merton's texts, its editions and the editing process fascinating reading. His exactitude is evident in the editing itself and in Appendices A and B (the textual notes and the table of correspondences with Merton's taped conferences). His immense learning is humbly hidden in the extensive and illuminating footnotes. This is exactly the sort of work we expect of O'Connell, to whom Merton scholars and readers owe a great debt of gratitude for bringing Merton's monastic conferences into print.

This is a book of conferences given by one who loved monastic life (I leave evaluation of his own observance of it to others) and edited by one who understands its author and his subject. While perhaps not the easiest introduction to Merton's monastic thought, it is one of the most comprehensive and engaging, and comes highly recommended for its contents and their implication for both monks and serious Christians. Because, as Merton wrote, they "are to enable us to *be* someone, not to do something" (9), monastic vows turn western society's quest for money, sex and power on its head. And at least some of us think that is exactly where such a quest belongs.

Bonnie Bowman Thurston

MERTON, Thomas, *On Christian Contemplation*, edited with a Preface by Paul M. Pearson (New York: New Directions, 2012), pp. xiv + 82. ISBN 978-0-8112-1996-9 (paper) \$13.95.

MERTON, Thomas, *On Eastern Meditation*, edited with an Introduction by Bonnie Thurston (New York: New Directions, 2012), pp. xviii + 76. ISBN 978-0-8112-1994-5 (paper) \$13.95.

"Honestly I do not think it matters a bit
whether one can sit cross-legged or not."

In this strange new world in which even the pope has an account on the online social network Twitter, I wondered, "Would Merton tweet?" and if so, "What would Merton tweet?" This line from *On Eastern Meditation* (59) would meet the standard of brevity required by Twitter's 140-character limit on messages. Though the above passage is the complete selection, it is one of the shorter ones from this volume. Still, most quotations from *On Eastern Meditation* are a few sentences or shorter. Knowing this, and seeing another volume of the same size and look from the same publisher, one might expect the same format inside *On Christian Contemplation*. This is not the case. Both volumes are well-chosen selections of Merton's

writings. Yet Editor Paul Pearson chose generally longer selections of text in *On Christian Contemplation* rather than Editor Bonnie Thurston's brief but well-organized excerpts in *On Eastern Meditation*. This means a very different reading experience for each volume, each having advantages. To be sure, both books are brief and the selections in *On Christian Contemplation* are only long in comparison with the even shorter selections in *On Eastern Meditation*.

My professional background as a librarian and archivist predisposes me to be mindful of a source even before I have read its corresponding excerpt. Because of this, it took a little getting used to the system of citing sources in *On Eastern Meditation*. Drawing from nine of Merton's books, selections are followed by a two- or three-letter code to designate the source book followed by its page number. The wisdom of this method is that, with many brief quotations per page, it lessens the interruption of the flow of text and prevents the annoyance of flipping to endnotes at the back of the book, or the poor aesthetics and overly academic look of footnotes. I quickly became accustomed to this system. Nevertheless, other questions arose. For example, the code "HGL" means the source is Merton's volume of letters *The Hidden Ground of Love*, but I immediately wanted to know to whom the letter was written and when. Maybe this is the genius of the work of the editor. I knew enough to find the source if curious, and if a well-chosen selection, I would be motivated to do so. (In fact, I now know the recipient of Merton's letter about whether it is important if one can sit cross-legged. However, I will not divulge this identity but will leave that to those curious enough to pursue this reference.)

Slight confusion regarding sources in *On Eastern Meditation* did not end for me in knowing which book was being quoted. I had forgotten a particular statement in the introduction that provided important clarification and had to revisit it later: "When a quotation is itself a quotation (Merton quoting Gandhi, for example) the reference includes Merton's citation" (xvi-xvii). As indicated, excerpts from *Gandhi on Non-Violence* are the most potentially confusing. One third of this book is an essay by Merton on Gandhi and the rest of the book contains Merton's selections from Gandhi's two-volume collection *Non-Violence in Peace and War*. If the reader misses the above line from the introduction of *On Eastern Meditation*, the difference between a quotation by Merton or by Gandhi may not be clear. In these citation examples, the former is by Merton and the latter by Gandhi: (GNV 22) and (II-151, GNV 47). If you understand the citation style, it is quite simple, but woe to those who skip book introductions because even the "Key to Abbreviations" provides no more clarification on this front.

Despite my quibbling over very small details, I really enjoyed Bonnie Thurston's selections in *On Eastern Meditation*. I found the volume well organized, and sometimes more systematic in organizing Merton's thoughts than Merton was for himself. To evoke again the model of Twitter, I found the "tweet" or "tweet and a half" sized selections to be useful. This is a treasure trove of brief bits of quotable Merton, which is much in demand in the Internet age. Returning to the "cross-legged" line from the beginning, Thurston places Merton's humorous quip about ambivalence regarding prayer posture from the letters next to a brief passage from *The Asian Journal* regarding contrary ideas in Zen and Tibetan Buddhism on the importance of sitting in a particular way. Not only did Thurston's ordering of the selections provide interesting connections, it was also useful to have a segment of a longer work lifted from its source context and framed on its own for emphasis. Surrounding what you want to give meaning with silence reminds me of the white space in a gallery around a work of art. Richard Rohr puts it more poetically, and I find it an apt description of the art of Thurston's work as an editor: "Beauty emerges from the silence around it. . . . If something is not surrounded by this ontological identity of silence and space, it is hard to appreciate something as singular and beautiful."¹ Again, "Silence is what surrounds *everything*, if you look long enough. It is the space between letters, words, and paragraphs that makes them decipherable and meaningful. When you can train yourself to reverence the silence around things, you first begin to see things in themselves and for themselves."²

I turn now to Paul Pearson's comparatively longer selections in *On Christian Contemplation*. There are some selections of no more than a paragraph, but most excerpts range from one to three of the small pages of this volume. Pearson draws from a diverse array of seventeen books, which include poetry, journals, volumes of letters and books of essays and spiritual writings. He also includes some previously unpublished material from the Merton Center's archives, a rare gift in a book of selected writings (see "Notes on Meditation" [63]), and draws from a few essays that had only been published in serial form and that had not been included in subsequent books until now (see "Toward a Theology of Prayer"; "Notes on Prayer and Action"; and "The Contemplative Life: Its Meaning and Necessity" [19-24, 53-55, 56]).

1. Richard Rohr, "Find God in the Depths of Silence," a lecture given at Festival of Faiths: Sacred Silence, May 15, 2013 in Louisville, KY (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uaMVKnpsDA8>: accessed September 25, 2013).

2. Richard Rohr, "Finding God in the Midst of Silence," *Sojourners* 42.3 (March 2013) 18.

Pearson intersperses Merton's reflections on contemplation with Merton's contemplative poetry. This style breaks up the contemplative notes and essays in a valuable way and helps to move the reader away from approaching contemplation as a completely mental exercise of the rational mind. As Pearson quotes from a conference by Merton in Alaska, "Mental prayer is only a phrase—you cannot pray with your mind" (25). Another essay Pearson includes further addresses this point: "How does the theology of prayer approach this problem? Not by reasoning but by symbol, by poetic insight, leading directly to those depths of the heart where these matters are experienced and where such conflicts are resolved" (from "Toward a Theology of Prayer" [20]). As with Thurston's volume, Pearson has arranged complementary selections. His alternation of poetry and prose also illustrates the point Merton is making about contemplation's need to lead from the mind to the heart and to the imagination.

Each of these slim volumes should appeal to both the new and seasoned Merton reader. Those new to Merton will find many hooks to lead them into his other works. Long-time readers will see something they have read before in a new light in Thurston's framing and juxtaposition of the quotations, and may find new gems in Pearson's thoughtful and diverse selections. Just do not expect, judging a book by its cover, to find each book to read like its companion. In constructing a book of thoughtful meditations, there are many ways to get it right, not unlike in prayer and meditation itself. As Merton puts it in *On Christian Contemplation*, "It isn't a question of there being one right way to pray, or one right answer to the question of prayer, and we should be perfectly free to explore all sorts of avenues and ways of prayer" (25).

Mark C. Meade

Thomas Merton, *Precious Thoughts: Daily Reading from the Correspondence of Thomas Merton*, selected and edited by Fiona Gardner (London: Darton, Longman, Todd, 2011), pp. 175. ISBN 978-0-232-52883-1 (paper) £10.99.

Robert Giroux, during his tenure as a trustee for the Merton Legacy Trust, often voiced his disapproval to fellow trustees Anne McCormick and Tommie O'Callaghan of what he called "fabricated books" that were put together by editing selections or excerpts from across Merton's writing. He disliked these "re-packagings" because he judged these collections threatened to deflect from the integrity of Merton's presentation of himself and his ideas in the more complete context of the books he had actually written for publication in his lifetime. While Giroux would