

reminded me that wrestling with my understanding of myself does not stop at midlife, but continues as I head down the stream of life and grow in my relationship with God. I remember why I return to silence so often, and why I run away from it. My profession is here-and-now, all in the service of a contemplative life, whether it is in solitude or neck deep in relationship.

Jeff Giraldo

*Universal Vision: A Centenary Celebration of Thomas Merton – European Perspectives from the Merton Journal*, special edition of *The Merton Journal*, edited with an Introduction by Fiona Gardner, Keith Griffin and Peter Ellis, Foreword by Paul M. Pearson (Thomas Merton Society of Great Britain and Ireland, 2014), pp. xvii + 152. ISBN 978-0-9551571-3-4 (paper) £8.99.

One of several significant volumes prepared in honor of the centenary of Thomas Merton's birth, this edition adds to the pleasure of scholars, European and North American, seeking to expand their exposure to current thought on the life and writing of this influential monk and his trans-Atlantic orientation. Paul M. Pearson provides precisely the perspective necessary to our reading of this volume, his unique vantage point mirroring that of Merton's – European by birth, transplanted by vocation. It should be noted that this collection, prepared and edited by European scholars, was partially funded by the International Thomas Merton Society, headquartered in the U.S. Such collaboration aptly propagates the dialogue between the two Merton societies; this publication reflects in practicality the "universal vision" of Merton, "a citizen of the whole world" who remained "at heart a European" (xv) as Pearson wisely reminds and persuades us in the percipient pages of his foreword (ix-xvii).

This compilation hospitably invites us to its reading with the variety of its genres and points of view: essays, poems, an interview and previously unpublished writings from Merton's Cambridge days, amplified by illustrations including his father's painting, photography and cartoons. A photograph of Merton in a thoughtful, envisioning pose and posture, taken by Sibylle Akers when she visited him at the Abbey of Gethsemani in 1959, is an apposite cover. Delightfully, Owen Merton's painting and several of the photographs of St. Antonin are presented in color. The fifteen contributors offer us reviews of Merton's brief durations at St. Antonin and Montauban, personal reflections on encounters with him and his writings, and penetrating examinations of his gyroscopic, continuing influence. Where bios follow the articles, they are helpful in introducing

us to the breadth of these European contributors. The last words of this edition are given to David Scott, whose inspiration led to the founding of the Thomas Merton Society of Great Britain and Ireland and to Donald Allchin, its president for 17 years. The editors succinctly introduce us to the volume's purposes and contents, advising us that Stephen Dunhill (along with Gary Hall and Elizabeth Holmes) has now taken up the editorship of the *Merton Journal*. (His sleuthing turned up three short personal contributions and a cartoon which were possibly published in student magazines and newspapers during Merton's time in England, as reported here.)

Rather than reviewing the offerings of *Universal Vision* in their listed order, I have chosen to respond in relation to my perception of their particular scholarly contributions. As such and not surprisingly, Malgorzata Poks' reading of *The Geography of Lograire* (117-30) is profound and perspicacious in its call on French philosophy, the structuralist theorists and her remarkable knowledge of Merton's embrace of language theory in this last volume of his poetry. Poks attends to her argument by tracing the influence of Lévi-Strauss, Merleau-Ponty, Jacques Lacan, Ferdinand de Saussure and Gaston Bachelard, amongst others, locating Barthes and Foucault as central to this mission. As I read her article, I remembered how Merton had introduced me to these theorists from his deeply Catholic perspective at the very time when I was studying them in graduate school. I couldn't recommend a better tutor, with Poks at his side.

Sonia Petisco's treatise on Merton's *Hagia Sophia* (99-116) follows a similarly theoretical vein in addressing his engagement of the feminine gender as the means of portraying Holy Wisdom. Hers is a strongly held but not fully persuasive conclusion as announced in her final paragraph where she claims that the "endless battle between men and women . . . is the real root of war in the world" (110). One sees that the fatigue deployed from these battles has led her very fine close reading to its declaration of Merton's failure to supersede the male-female dichotomy in that he has chosen to metaphorize Wisdom as female rather than to understand that such Wisdom existed before the creation of gender. Her linguistic training grounds an intensely rationalized argument complete with diagrammatic support but it literalizes Merton's choice of metaphor and theology in a somewhat foreclosing manner. For the sake of such argument, I would contend that gender is as essential to the nature of God as is being itself and not, indeed, a construct devolving from creation. I commend this essay to readers for the opportunity it gives one to think through some of these complex issues while enjoying the pleasure of the poem itself.

Personal reflections of encounters with Merton and his correspon-

dents are entirely appropriate to this commemorating volume. Donald Allchin's piece, "A Liberator, a Reconciler" (145-49), written soon after Merton's death, is a beautifully insightful eulogy rendering the "unique and incomparable" (145) dimensions of Merton's universal humanity. Never sentimental, Allchin encourages us all to "trace out the course of [Merton]'s development" (145-46) and its foundational Christology, both of which enabled him to "liberate something in those who came in touch with him" (149) through his writings or in person. The accompanying photograph shows the two men in congenial conversation in front of Gethsemani Abbey when Allchin was there on one of his fairly frequent visits in 1967 and 1968. This piece is counterpointed by David Scott in his two-part poem (21-22) and a very brief personal essay (150-52) on his early encounters with Merton's writings. The poems are set at 71 Bridge Street (Merton's Cambridge address) and Merton's hermitage (1964); by this, Scott connects the continuum of the two by finding in Merton's drunken, carousing "doublevision" days at Cambridge, the cartoons later echoed in his writings on Chuang Tzu and his love for jazz, the seeds come to fruition in the hermitage where they might join the icons by which "to see" into Merton's soul.

Dominique Brulé (1-9) reaches further back into Merton's childhood experiences in France where he went to live with his father in 1925. Brulé offers the eighteen-year-old Georges Linières as a possible model for Merton in his early teen years. A resident of Saint-Antonin whom Merton described as a "wonderful good buddy" (7) quite possibly influenced the younger Tom to become a writer, a sportsman and a teacher. This comradeship, simultaneously playing out while Merton was a student at the hated Lycée Ingres in Montauban, suggests that redemptive experience was also present during those difficult years of identity formation in which Merton was a bullied and lonely young boy.

When Gary Hall takes up a study of "Grace's House" (23-38), some fascinating speculation about poetry as play is moved along by his analysis of this poem's images and the psychic state of Merton's response to their pre-lapsarian wisdom: "Alas, there is no road to Grace's house!" He pronounces such in his later *Conjectures of a Guilty Bystander* when he writes that in modern American culture, the joys of life have only been parodied by Disney et al. Paradoxically, Merton claims the monastic life and the sorrows of *monos* as fundamental to joy because "tears over the way things are . . . enable you to accept the way things are with joy" (33). Although embedded amongst some personal musings, Hall's observations are moving to both him and his reader.

The intrigue of Merton's personality and personhood are approached

in essays by James G. R. Cronin (72-84), Lars Adolfsson (39-49) and Fernando Beltrán Llavador (131-44), each from his own vocation and perspective, perhaps all deriving from their seeing Merton as having a “person-centered” view of life as claimed by Robert Imperato.<sup>1</sup> Cronin briefly but aptly outlines Merton’s fundamental belief that authenticity is grounded in the relation of oneself to the Other. Cronin then examines the dilemmas of the “innocent bystander,” debunked by Merton’s ever more complicated and perilous civic engagements which were necessarily and almost completely confined to his writings, with Czeslaw Milosz as his mentor on this path. Recounting his own visit to the landscapes of Merton’s Gethsemani, Beltrán reiterates the observations of many readers and scholars that “as Thomas Merton went deeper into the source of his own and all life, his prophetic vision grew more universal” (135). This, Beltrán argues, results from Merton’s profound understanding of the Trinitarian dynamics of all personhood – the “I,” the “Other” and the Christ – in its essential capacity for Love, by which Merton made his radical claim that “we are already one.”<sup>2</sup> Adolfsson reflects on the paradoxes of the questions that Merton lived with in Rilkean wisdom and how they manifested in his life and more especially in his experience of gendered love. As a more convincing and complete examination of Merton’s relationship with M., in particular, I suggest Donald Grayston’s recently-published *Thomas Merton and the Noonday Demon* (chapter 7).<sup>3</sup>

In a change of genre, Detlev Cuntz of Germany interviews Dr. Hildegard Goss-Mayr, a correspondent of Merton through the International Fellowship of Reconciliation and a disseminator in Europe of his “silenced” works on peace (58-71). She discusses her meeting with Merton, along with their dedication to peace in the nuclear age. Goss-Mayr explains that he made very clear that he did not think sensational actions were advisable to peacemaking and that contemplative wisdom informed the patience and prayer necessary to the process. One sees again in this interview the reasons for Merton’s swift and decisive resignation from the fellowship after the self-immolation of Roger Laporte in New York in 1965 and for his frustrations with being silenced in the mid-sixties on matters of peace and war by his order.

Mario Zaninelli, a priest in Milan and co-founder of the Associazione

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1. Robert Imperato, *Merton and Walsh on the Person* (Brookfield, WI: Liturgical Publications, 1987) 1.

2. Thomas Merton, *The Asian Journal*, ed. Naomi Burton Stone, Brother Patrick Hart and James Laughlin (New York: New Directions, 1973) 308.

3. Donald Grayston, *Thomas Merton and the Noonday Demon: The Camaldoli Correspondence* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2015) 255-79.

Thomas Merton in Italy, continues such inquiries into both the published and unpublished correspondence between Merton and Giovanni Battista Montini, later Pope Paul VI, seeing in it the influences of its blessings on and guidance in Merton's Cistercian commitments (85-98). Zaninelli concludes that even though Merton considered his contribution to the Pope's initiative in "Message of Contemplatives" (1967)<sup>4</sup> to be an "utterly forgotten" failure, his enormous desire for "contemplative renewal" by integrating the cloistered contemplative life with the external life of influence in the world "could open great prospects for the renewal of religious life today" (96). In response, one can only hope that the current papal authority will continue in this vein as he has begun. Maurizio Renzini, President of the Associazione Thomas Merton Italia, takes up the correspondence between Merton and Giorgio La Pira, longtime mayor of Florence and prominent peace activist (50-57). Renzini finds in their friendship, begun by La Pira's visit to Gethsemani in 1964, a desire for influence on the politics of America which had at that time become a profoundly disturbing concern to both of them in their efforts to escalate peacemaking in the world and in their shared respect for both the active and contemplative lives necessary to the endeavor. The attention paid to these sets of correspondence is worthwhile in that it once again reminds us of the overwhelming generosity and expansive engagement that Merton offered to his correspondents along with his unrelenting willingness to seek wisdom, peace and personhood wherever it might be found and fostered.

This volume of European perspectives on Thomas Merton is a fine centennial delight for the community of his students and friends. It will provide reference and reflection for those who indulge it, comprising a confederacy of intellectual and spiritual insights, to be selected and mused on, each for its own merit, inflection and further value in the next century of thought and wisdom from the legacy of this compelling, influential and enigmatic writer/monk, whose humanity has blessed us all with his "universal vision."

Lynn R. Szabo

DEIGNAN, Kathleen Noone, CND, *Prophet and Mystic of Creation: On Retreat with Thomas Merton*, 6 Conferences on 2 DVDs / 3 CDs (Rockville, MD: Now You Know Media, 2014) \$29.95 (DVDs); \$19.95 (CDs); \$15.95 (MP3).

This series of six short presentations (between 21 and 25 minutes each)

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4. Thomas Merton, *The Hidden Ground of Love: Letters on Religious Experience and Social Concerns*, ed. William H. Shannon (New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 1985) 154-58.