

raphy. When I teach photography classes, I tell my students that I want photographs that bring out the meaning in the subject. I instruct them to take time and carefully plan what it is that they are trying to convey. The contemplative photographer takes the time to receive the essence, the “hidden wholeness” of the subject.

The most useful aspect of the book is the opportunity to contemplate Merton’s photographs, much like the way the twentieth-century spiritual writer Henri Nouwen spent hours in St. Petersburg, Russia in front of Rembrandt’s *Return of the Prodigal Son*. Recently, Lindsay Boyer, author of *Centering Prayer for Everyone*, has urged us, like Nouwen and Merton, to practice *visio divina*, to seek God with the eyes of our hearts. She writes:

Visio divina is a form of divine seeing in which we prayerfully invite God to speak to our hearts as we look at an image. While *lectio divina* is a traditional way of reading a text with the ear of the heart, in *visio divina*, *lectio*’s visual cousin, we look at an image with the eye of the heart. As we gaze, present to an image without any particular agenda, we allow it to speak to us in words or wordlessly with a divine voice.¹¹

Beholding Paradise is essentially about seeing, as opposed to merely looking. Photographers will find excellent examples of subjects for contemplative photography such as an open door with light coming through, windows on buildings, tree stumps, Shaker buildings and furniture, to mention but a few. Contemplative people, who may or may not be photographers, will find a plethora of subjects for *visio divina*, and this contemplative practice will enrich their mystical journey.

I conclude this review with a koan-like statement by Merton that I believe sums up the quality of his photos showcased in this book: “If Zen has any preference, it is for glass that is plain has no color and is ‘just glass.’”

J. Patrick Mahon

THURSTON, Bonnie, *Shaped by the End You Live For: Thomas Merton’s Monastic Spirituality*, Foreword by Paul Quenon, OCSO (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2020), pp. xix, 166. ISBN 978-0-8146-8832-8 (paper) \$19.95.

In this insightful book, Bonnie Thurston turns our attention to Thomas Merton’s monastic worldview with the central claim: “if one does not understand Merton as a monk, one does

11. See www.lindsayboyer.com/vivio-divina. I refer to www.biloxidiocese.org/visio-divina for a discussion of *visio divina* and the five steps in the practice.

not understand Merton” (xiv). To this end, Thurston seeks to demonstrate how Merton “understood some aspects of the monastic spirituality that undergirded all the rest of his thought and work” (13), in the particular context of his Christological worldview. Thurston’s construction, based on close, careful attention to relevant source material, draws deeply on writings and events in Merton’s life, and offers a thoroughly engaging contribution to existing scholarship. By situating Merton’s persistent query – what *is* the end you live for – in the biographical arc of his life, Thurston highlights Merton’s emergent and evolving self-understanding. By extending consideration of Merton’s query and vision to a broad audience of non-monastic and monastic readers, Thurston renders his humanistic search a site for present and future exploration. Although the content of Thurston’s argument treads familiar ground, a nuanced treatment emerges. Thurston’s illuminative approach to Merton supplies a timely and welcome examination of his monastic worldview.

Ten chapters structure Thurston’s presentation of Merton’s monastic spirituality in this book. The first four chapters supply a stable foundation. The first chapter, “Merton’s Call to Monastic Life” (1-16), introduces the primary idea of monastic life as a relationship to Jesus Christ, an idea embedded at the core of Merton’s monastic spirituality. Thurston views Merton’s early biography as “rootless, privileged, and ripe for conversion” (5) – he is a figure whose spiritual hunger was shared by many in his time, whose intellect was continuously challenged, and whose particular experiences were formative to his monastic vocation. Merton’s understanding of monastic spirituality would mature as he grew in his monastic vocation. Chapter two, “The Temptation of ‘Holier Than Thou’” (17-33), recounts how the middle years of Merton’s monastic life provided space and opportunity for him to confront earlier operating assumptions and to learn that monastic spirituality is centered in mutual love for all persons (see 31). The implications of this insight, by which Merton reorients both his writing life and his monastic life toward an “attitude of listening” (36), are examined in chapter three, “Merton’s Presuppositions” (35-49). The role of listening remains a persistent theme as Thurston considers how Merton learned to live a True Self, a life “from ‘the inside out’” (41), and envisioned a life of prayer as a means of engaging directly with the world inside and beyond the monastery. Thurston’s clear examination of Merton’s idea – that one must work consistently from the foundation of the God within (see 40-42) – serves well as a foundation for understanding how Merton would engage personal, social and religious concerns. Thurston demonstrates that this idea also helps us understand Merton’s judgments that the contemplative and active lives are essentially one (see

54) and that to pray for the world is to act in the world (see 60, 62, 64) in chapter four, “Monastic Life: Fleeing the World?” (51-64). The collective content of these four chapters informs the remainder of the book.

The intimate relationship between listening and obedience as a means of conformity to Jesus Christ in the monastic life is considered in the next chapter, “Obedience and Silence” (65-80). Here, Thurston examines the biblical foundation for monastic obedience (see 68-71), Merton’s interpretation of monastic obedience in relation to the example of Jesus Christ (see 71-74), and the role of listening as a link between obedience and silence (see 74-80). “Monastic Solitude,” chapter six (81-96), centers this focus on Merton’s teachings about spiritual solitude and its relationship to love. Prayer – as a constant awareness and reception of God (see 99-101), tied to a True Self – is addressed in the next two chapters. Chapter seven, “Merton’s Principles of Prayer (Part 1)” (97-110), presents five principles gleaned from Merton’s writings about his own prayer; chapter eight, “Merton’s Principles of Prayer (Part 2)” (111-26), presents Merton’s teachings on prayer given in his 1968 Alaskan and Redwoods conferences. With these chapters, Thurston emphasizes foundational connections that highlight an intellectual dynamism in Merton’s monastic spirituality. In particular, Thurston’s treatment of Merton’s Alaskan conferences revisits and reinforces a number of previous ideas. Prayer unites the individual with others, binds the individual in community, and exercises freedom (see 115). Thurston closes these chapters by summarizing and assessing consistent themes of non-duality, simplicity and temporality in Merton’s ideas about prayer.

Chapter nine organizes the content of the previous chapters around Merton’s observation regarding “The End You Live For” (127-39). Merton’s response, in the context of a monastic worldview, was to live rightly oriented, as a True Self, longing for and recognizing the God within, loving oneself and others (see 137-38). The element of choice is addressed in the final chapter, “Merton on Saying ‘Yes’: Creative Consent” (141-53). Drawing on a letter Merton wrote to Mother Myriam Dardenne as a guide, Thurston explains: “Both monastic spirituality and Christian spirituality at its core are about liberation, the freedom both to open up to what is as yet unknown . . . and to assist others to become more free” (151). A thoroughly aspirational and eschatological aim – at the core of the Christian life – invites a fitting final reflection on the entire book. The book concludes with a descriptive bibliography, acknowledgements and a final word of gratitude to the reader.

Gratitude is a gesture received and reciprocated. This is a book with purpose. By querying operating assumptions and dominating myths,

Thurston opens alternative angles for thought. The result broadens and refines our understanding. In the Foreword, Br. Paul Quenon, OCSO describes “a lucidity and balance, an engaging counterpoint of themes that does justice to Merton’s multifaceted thought yet retains basic simplicity” (xii) in his reading of the book. Thurston’s achievement invites and challenges readers to meet Merton as a fellow traveler, a fellow seeker and a fellow human being.

Bernadette McNary-Zak

MALEWITZ, THOMAS E., *Authenticity, Passion, and Advocacy: Approaching Adolescent Spirituality from the Life and Wisdom of Thomas Merton*, Foreword by Thomas Del Prete (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2020), pp. xxi, 184. ISBN: 978-2-5326-8222-3 (paper) \$24.00.

“Trust the process” is a rather vague phrase that we often hear when it comes to the discomfort inherent in personal and social change and growth. But in his book *Authenticity, Passion, and Advocacy: Approaching Adolescent Spirituality from the Life and Wisdom of Thomas Merton*, Thomas E. Malewitz unpacks a process for us that, like much good teaching and direction, is rooted in a deep acknowledgement of, and appreciation for, the whole human. Malewitz seamlessly brings together the practical and the mystical. He does this by showing us how by practically making time and space for the mystical, the mystical becomes a quite practical aspect of our lives that is accessible in our daily activities and unfolds in the context of our relationships.

In any given society, the welfare of our children ranks high on our lists of stated priorities. However, the lack of comprehensive well-being among many individuals and groups in our societies does not reflect that priority and suggests that desire alone cannot create desired outcomes. Many of the maladies in our families and societies arise from the lack of an intentional formation of the whole individual: body, mind and spirit formed in the context of an openness and mutuality that can only exist in loving community. Lack of formation can lead to a disconnect from the awareness of the divine image living in each of us.

Malewitz has written a book for our time and place precisely because it is a book for every time and place. It is a book about the timeless made manifest in human character in real-time in a particular time and place. Practical, wise, grounded, but with an ear to the mystical and transcendent, this book is a must-read for parents, educators and those seeking to recover lost aspects of their earlier selves. As a psychotherapist and father of three, I am aware that the child within each of us is always present and often calling out to us in some way. As Anne Lamott has said, “We are