

Evolution is ongoing, and as generation after generation of human beings traverse the earth, we name and re-name and re-name again the world we see and hear around us. But what all generations seem to have in common is *mystery*. “We are ever evolving, ever becoming, and ever unfolding,” Hall writes. “Identity is an ever-moving target, and any conviction that the self is singular or fixed is limiting and often even harmful. . . . Maybe when sexuality and gender forgo binary expectations, they are freer to be alive within us” (98-99). As Hall describes the “rooted contemplative life” (3) early in the book, she uses the metaphor of a plant to illustrate her vision of depth and inter-connection with all that lives, a plant with an extensive root system, separate subsidiary roots that join together at the main root and rise through the material world, find fresh breath and ascend with powerful movement through levels and stratospheres that buoy and bound us even higher to where there is only harmony. Interestingly enough, Hall’s formal contemplative journey related here begins and ends with Merton. A Merton essay launches Hall’s Trappist tour-de-force and a line from Merton’s *The Seven Storey Mountain*<sup>2</sup>—the Latin phrase at the very end that translates into “It is the end of the book, not the end of the searching” (151)—comes near the close of Hall’s final chapter, appropriately titled “Everlasting Depths: Queering the Desert,” for the desert is among the hallmark symbols of the Christian contemplative tradition’s radical response to spiritual seeking. But what wins the day is the unmistakable sincerity of Rev. Hall’s voice and her unremitting advocacy for a contemplative way of life based on compassionate, here-in-the-moment action. Cherish the moment, work for justice.

George G. Kehoe

OSGOOD, Libby, CND, ed., *Green Saints for a Green Generation* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2024), pp. xxv + 219. ISBN 978-1-62698-590-2 (paper) \$30.00.

*Green Saints for a Green Generation*, edited by Libby Osgood, invites reflection on a diverse constellation of inspired and inspiring figures who have embodied ecospirituality. It simultaneously stimulates a consideration of how we might personally and collectively enflesh eco-spirituality in the present, through our own efforts to imitate the lives of these green saints. Throughout the book, we are prompted to consider the link between an ecologically grounded spirituality – which is attentive, for instance, to the sacramentality of creation, the interdependence of the web of life, and

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2. Thomas Merton, *The Seven Storey Mountain* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1948) 423.

the presence of God in all things – and environmental action. As Osgood puts it in the book’s introduction, the witness of green saints can aid us in developing “an ecospirituality attentive to our place in the greater planetary ecology,” while also inspiring us to “discern environmentally beneficial practices” (xvi).

This collection consists of essays written by women theologians aged twenty-five to forty-five, all of whom have grown up steeped in an “ecological consciousness” (xi) as members of the “green generation” (xviii). The saintly figures reflected on span from ascetics of the fourth and fifth centuries to a Nobel Prize-winning author who wrote during the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. In her foreword, Elizabeth A. Johnson notes that the essays in this collection are bound by a broad conception of the communion of saints, “an intergenerational band of friends of God and prophets,” that both includes and exceeds the Church’s circle of officially canonized saints (x). Within *Green Saints*, we find chapters on the desert mothers and St. Clare of Assisi, St. Ignatius, Our Lady of Guadalupe and Juan Diego, St. John of the Cross and Marguerite Bourgeoys, Toni Morrison and Thomas Merton, Sr. Paula González and Ken Saro-Wiwa, Sr. Laura Vicuña, the Martyrs of the Amazon, and the theme of biodiversity.

Organized chronologically, the collection opens with an essay by Flora X. Tang entitled “The Desert Mothers and Our Mothers: Desert Spirituality as Ecological Praxis in the Everyday” (1-16). Throughout, Tang considers the ecospiritual and ecojustice wisdom transmitted by a variety of resilient, creative and wise women, from the desert ammas of the fourth and fifth century to the mothers she has encountered in contemporary Palestine, to her own biological ancestors. Tang draws potent inspiration from the capacity of mothers to constructively navigate various deserts, from the literal deserts of Egypt, Syria and Palestine to the metaphorical deserts imposed by food apartheid. She reflects on our capacity for resisting and converting away from the logic of our catastrophic status quo by cultivating an “ascetic ecological spirituality” (8) while also aligning our lives with organized and collective efforts aimed at promoting systemic change.

While each of the chapters in this volume are worth reading, two additional pieces – one by Céire Kealty and the other by Kaitlyn Lightfoot – should be of particular interest to seekers and scholars drawn to Merton, and to members of the International Thomas Merton Society. Céire Kealty, a 2017 Daggy Scholar, contributes “Weaving and Wearing Creation: What Saint Clare of Assisi Can Teach Us about Our Clothes” (17-31). Kealty first reflects on the current shape of the textile industry. She considers both the capacity of garments to convey “human creativity, joined together with the Earth’s splendor” (23), as well as the reality

that garments are being produced and commodified in ways that create grave eco-social harm. Next, she considers St. Clare of Assisi's insights, by attending to her relationship to and treatment of textiles, including through her own devoted practice of sewing linens. Lastly, Kealty reflects on our capacity for envisioning and enfleshing a more just and sustainable garment industry, inspired by the life of St. Clare.

In "Thomas Merton, Original Unity, and Indigenous Eco-Theology" (135-49), Kaitlyn Lightfoot reflects on Merton's sense of the "original unity of creation" (136), as well as his engagement with Indigenous wisdom, particularly the wisdom of the Zapotec People. For Lightfoot, Merton guides his readers to recognize that in order to move through ecological catastrophe, we need to convert away from the selfishness of the false self, and the selfishness of the systems of sin that the false self forms and is formed by. We need to convert toward our original unity, our "communion with God, humanity, and all creation" (139). Lightfoot emphasizes that Merton gained deep insight by studying and reflecting on the Zapotec people. She proposes that those who are interested in recovering our original unity should turn to listen deeply to the wisdom of Indigenous peoples and traditions, a wisdom that has been "suppressed and silenced by the colonizing church and society" (142).

As we navigate the entangled crises of our moment while reclaiming our place in the wider web of life, this book can be a powerful guide. As we strive to resist and replace worldviews, practices and systems that breed injustice and ecological degradation, while envisioning and enfleshing a more just and sustainable future, this book can be a powerful guide. We can turn to the green saints lifted up by this book as our friends and our guides, our companions on the path of ecological conversion.

James Robinson

HORAN, Daniel P., *Fear and Faith: Hope and Wholeness in a Fractured World* (New York: Paulist Press, 2024), pp. xviii + 97. ISBN 978-0-809-5693-1 (paper) \$16.95.

In this short but compelling book, Daniel Horan examines a natural emotion and offers hope as an antidote to its exploitation by some contemporary church leaders and politicians in the United States and elsewhere. Following his brief introduction (ix-xviii), in chapter 1, "Natural and Unnatural Fear, Rational and Irrational Hope" (1-24), Horan draws on works by contemporary analysts as well as an essay by Thomas Merton, "Advent: Hope or Delusion."<sup>1</sup> As summarized by Horan, Merton de-

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1. Thomas Merton, *Seasons of Celebration* (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux,