

point, linger there, staying with what it has to say to you” (22). De Waal encourages the same approach with the photographs from Merton that she has chosen to include. One photograph accompanies each day of the retreat; the only practical difficulty is the need to flip back and forth to look at the photograph while reading the text for that day.

After recognizing the variety of approaches to retreat yet insisting on essentials in one’s approach to retreat, de Waal provides an impressive overview of Merton’s life and work before moving into the seven days of retreat. A detailed review of each day of the retreat seems antithetical to the spirit of the book and indeed to Merton’s convictions as well. Rather than summarize what spiritual insights emerge in my reading, I recommend you read and pray with this text for yourself, and see what happens. What Merton says in the author’s note about *New Seeds of Contemplation* appears to apply: “The book does not claim, either, to be a work of art. Practically anybody else with the same interests might possibly have written it much better. . . . For this is the kind of book that achieves an effect that is not and cannot be controlled by any human author. If you can bring yourself, somehow, to read it in communion with the God in Whose Presence it was written, it will interest you and you will probably draw from fruit from it, more by His grace than by the author’s efforts” (*NSC* xv).

Emma McDonald Kennedy

CANNON, Nass, Jr., *In Search of the Healing Spirit*, edited by Clare E. B. Cannon, Bryant Cannon and John Cannon (Eugene, OR: Resource Publications 2023), pp. xxi +142. ISBN 978-1-6667-5553-4 (paper) \$21.00.

In Search of the Healing Spirit is an intimate collection of essays and articles written by Dr. Nass Cannon, Jr., who was a renowned professor of medicine, philanthropist and distinguished Thomas Merton scholar. He was also a cherished member of the International Thomas Merton Society. This book was compiled, revised and published posthumously by Clare E. B. Cannon, Bryant Cannon and John Cannon, who edited the book in honor of their beloved father. The editors also added their thoughtful and heartfelt personal notes. In the Foreword, Dr. Cannon’s son John tells us about his father’s generous heart and deep Catholic faith. The book’s Introduction, written by Bryant Cannon, provides a brief biography of Dr. Cannon, touching on his altruism, his soul-searching and his deep connection with Thomas Merton. In the Afterword, Dr. Cannon’s daughter Clare offers an insightful look at the loving soul of Dr. Cannon and their beautiful father–daughter relationship.

This book introduces readers to some of Dr. Cannon’s meditations,

struggles and thoughts about select quintessential existential questions. It is a book about individual identity, purpose, faith and redemption. As a physician, Dr. Cannon explores the mystery of life and death from the viewpoint of a “broken healer” (1). His angle is different; his perspective is one that is seldom discussed or exposed. He shows himself humble and vulnerable and brings readers into his deeply human thoughts.

His first three essays are written to his colleagues, his peers, fellow humans and healers. He states that brokenness is a human trait shared by those seeking medical care as well as by those acting as providers. It is the realization of his own fragility and mortality that allows the healer to be genuinely empathetic and merciful. T. S. Eliot talked about the intersection of time and timelessness, the subtle blend of the material and the transcendent.¹ Dr. Cannon focuses on integral healing, a healing that blends harmony of the soul, mind and body. He is not trying to solve the mystery of human suffering; nor is he allowing himself to get distracted looking for answers to the “why.” That is not his call. Instead, he is genuinely committed to his duty to alleviate, to heal, and to do so in wholeness. He is intensely aware of his limitations and it is precisely and paradoxically in it where he finds his “superpower.” The realization of his inner poverty brings him closer to God and His mercy, allowing God’s light to shine bright from within.

In the chapter “A Quest for Health” (9-22), Dr. Cannon centers on the qualities of sorrow and tenderheartedness of the “broken healer” (1). He touches on the importance of educating the new generations of health care givers, prioritizing loving care. From his point of view, the formation of empathetic providers requires spiritual growth through prayer and fasting, as well as in recognizing the duty of healing as a sacred combination of art, science and virtue.

His essay “Concupiscence or Caritas” (23-37) is a call to a reform of our current healthcare system. Dr. Cannon had a dream! He laments the insatiable consumption fueling our individual and collective appetites and instead longs for a shift that resets health care based in Caritas, a compassionate care that originates in the spiritual realm. His vision is a reminder of the ever-powerful words of Jesus, “Whatsoever you do for the least of mine, you do for me” (Mt. 25:40).

The remaining essays prioritize the author’s journey into self-identity, and bear the influence of Merton’s writings. Dr. Cannon’s deep and insightful knowledge of the brilliant monk, writer and activist are delightfully showcased in this book. The author has a great capacity to summarize and to focus on wisdom and beauty. He quotes Merton liberally, as

1. T. S. Eliot, “Dry Salvages,” *Four Quartets* (New York: Harper Collins, 1943, 1971) 44.

a spiritual mentor, as a guide, as a poet, as a fellow human. The essays show a “friendship” with Merton, a mystical relationship, by definition, one beyond time and space. Dr. Cannon explores Merton, studies him, expands on his concepts of true self, solitude, interfaith dialogue, peacemaking and oneness. His links to Father Louis are diverse and clever, and there you find Merton linked with Camus (119-28) or walking hand by hand with St. John of the Cross (74-84).

Dr. Cannon’s words are written with sincerity, humility, vulnerability and empathy. He ponders on the philosophical “Who am I?” He finds the mystical answer in his deep faith, in prayer and in altruism. He finds it through the writings of Thomas Merton. *In Search of the Healing Spirit* is a trek inside the soul, to the deepest part of a self, an encounter with an essential identity, a oneness with God. Like Michaelangelo envisioning David within a solid piece of marble in Florence, Dr. Cannon cuts through the weeds, cleans the clutter and hence clears the path to his own core, to the little spot of nothingness in the center of being, to his “point vierge.”

Jose Andujar

FINLEY, James, *The Healing Path: A Memoir and an Invitation* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2023), pp. xxi, 166. ISBN 978-1626985100 (paper) \$22.00.

As a clinical psychologist and renowned spiritual retreat leader, James Finley has accumulated decades of experience intensely listening to patients and retreatants intimately share their stories of trauma. In *The Healing Path: A Memoir and an Invitation*, Finley is the vulnerable one, letting readers in on the “bittersweet alchemy” (8) of his own life. He reveals details about the repeated traumas he endured in childhood and young adulthood, and the interior darkness that followed. But the author moves far beyond a litany of painful memories to probe the mystery of spiritual awakening in the depths of interior upheaval and sorrow.

Finley aptly refers to *The Healing Path* as a kind of teaching memoir, a way to share life lessons about inner brokenness. Memoir, as a literary genre, has often been dominated by celebrities and political figures with prominent platforms and paid ghostwriters. Memoirists may have dramatic stories to tell, but their narratives can feel as though the writer “has been stranded on the island of their own personal life story, stranded there with no connection at all to the mainland.”¹ What is often missing in these titles is real depth of content, an honest and deep grappling, an authentic personal or intellectual pursuit of meaning and understanding.

1. Judith Barrington, *Writing the Memoir* (Portland, OR: Eighth Mountain Press, 2002) 141.