

our handling of the torn fabric of life. The poet is William Stafford, and the poem is entitled “The Way It Is”:<sup>6</sup>

There’s a thread you follow. It goes among  
things that change. But it doesn’t change.  
People wonder about what you are pursuing.  
You have to explain about the thread.  
But it is hard for others to see.  
While you hold it you can’t get lost.  
Tragedies happen; people get hurt  
or die; and you suffer and get old.  
Nothing you do can stop time’s unfolding.  
You don’t ever let go of the thread.

Gray Matthews

STRAUB, Gerard Thomas, with Jonathan Montaldo, *Reading Thomas Merton and Longing for God in Haiti: Learning Wisdom in the School of My Life* (Fort Pierce, FL: Pax et Bonum Communications, 2022), pp. 359. ISBN: 979-8-9860888-1-5 (paper) \$20.00.

Gerry Straub opens his book with a “friendly warning” in which he explains that he has written and directed twenty documentary films focused on the plight of the poor in nations like Brazil, El Salvador, India, Kenya, Jamaica and Haiti. Currently, he directs the Santa Chiara Children’s Center in Port au Prince, providing kids a place to be kids and escape from dangers of the streets.

Sharing learnings in the school of his life, Straub offers reflections in five parts: entering into silence and solitude; out of Africa; lessons learned along poverty road; Haiti; Louie’s place, journal of a retreat December 3-10, 2000 at Merton’s hermitage at the Abbey of Gethsemani.

Alone in the woods, praying and writing on the table on which Merton wrote some of his masterpieces, Straub got a nibble of the solitude Merton desired and discovered in the last years of his life. The following text may give readers of this review a taste of Straub’s writing:

Thursday, December 7, 2000. I spent a few hours today reading Merton’s *No Man Is an Island*. I bought the paperback edition I’m reading a long time ago. I know because it has a sticker price of \$4.95 on it. What I found interesting as I read it, besides Merton’s insights and his way of expressing himself, is the passages I’d highlighted

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6. William Stafford, *The Way It Is: New and Selected Poems* (Minneapolis, MN: Graywolf Press, 1998) 42.

with a yellow marking pen when I first read it (circa 1988). Back then, I caught a glimpse of what Merton was saying, but not enough of it to have any real impact on my life. Today as I read it, Merton's thoughts were jumping off the pages, and I was able to catch hold of them and apply them to my life. . . . There seems to be so many options, so many ways to God – yet it all comes down to one basic truth that each of us needs to discover, embrace, and live. (265-66)

Throughout this book, Straub does not shy away from confronting the injustice of global poverty. He states that more than 10,000 children a day die of starvation or diseases related to hunger. More alarming, a recent United Nations report documents 25,000 deaths world-wide daily to hunger. After steadily declining for a decade, such destitution affects nearly 10% of people globally. In the period Straub was writing this book, the number of undernourished people grew by as many as 150 million, a crisis driven largely by conflict, climate and the pandemic.<sup>1</sup>

Reading such statistics, I recalled teaching mission and evangelism courses in the 1980s. I drew on titles like *A Theology of Liberation* by Gustavo Gutiérrez, *Rich Christians in a World of Hunger* by Ron Sider and *Enough is Enough* by John V. Taylor. Students were expected to participate in a service ministry. Doing so, they sought and did make a difference. Some have shared that their class projects became life vocations. And yet the crisis, recorded by Gerry Straub, worsens.

Straub quotes extensively from Merton and other sources. Key insights for me include Straub's understanding that "Prayer is a gift of Love, and a means of living our whole life in communion with the Lord, who through the Incarnation came to share in our human condition. . . . We live in a world of stark inequality and injustice. So did Jesus. . . . So should we. For the follower of Jesus, compassion is not an option; it's an obligation . . . and a sign our lives have been transformed into the healing presence of Christ" (239, 241). I am grateful for Straub's response to a global crisis, running a home for forty-five abandoned, displaced youth. More information about this work is available at <https://santachiaracc.org/>. I recommend this book for daily devotions, or a study group. Going forward, I hope to hear more of Straub's work.

Paul R. Dekar

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1. See <https://www.un.org/en/chronicle/article/losing-25000-hunger-every-day>.