

America. Kaplan and Shaul Magid, Associate Professor and Chair of the Department of Jewish Philosophy in the Jewish Theological Seminary of America, interview Rabbi Zalman. I had to have my pencil with me through the whole book just to keep me on track, and I found myself putting a line down almost every one of Rabbi Zalman's responses. He describes Merton in a way I hadn't experienced before. It's something to do with the fresh, modern rabbinic diction, the stories, and the humour. He describes arriving at the monastery to visit Merton. He gets to the front door and there's a rope to pull with a cross on the end of it. 'And I'm standing there thinking, how am I going to ring that bell? I take the rope a little higher than the cross and I give it a pull. A monk was standing inside in the shadow, but I didn't see him. He came out and said, "An interesting solution to a problem of conscience."' "

Seeing the other side of some of the letters in *The Hidden Ground of Love* is one of the great joys of this book. Understanding Merton's deep love of the Word as a creative and dynamic concept is another, and travelling with Merton through the largely uncharted ground of interfaith relationships as it began to touch the Catholic Church in the 60s, is a third. This is the stuff of a 'rattle-bag' of conference papers. If you want a calmer chapter in the midst of the storm then can I recommend the magisterial essay of Bill Shannon, Thomas Merton and Judaism.

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Becoming Who You Are: Insights on the True Self from Thomas Merton And Other Saints

James Martin, S.J.

Mahwah, NJ.: Hidden Spring,
ISBN 158768036X. \$10

One of James Martin's early books, *In Good Company: The Fast Track from the Corporate World to Poverty, Chastity and Obedience*, was compared in one of its jacket blurbs to "a *Seven Storey Mountain* for a new generation of seekers" and "the finest book on finding a religious vocation since Thomas Merton's *Secular Journal*." The book's connection with Merton however went beyond its jacket blurbs to the influence Merton played on the author's conversion, vocation, and continuing spiritual journey. The proliferation of Martin's recent publications is also reminiscent of Merton. *Becoming Who You Are* is Martin's third book to be published in 2006 alone, following on from his highly successful and more substantial book, *My Life With the Saints*, published in March and the much slimmer *Lourdes Diary: Seven Days at the Grotto of Massabielle*, published in May.

Becoming Who You Are grew out of a lecture Martin gave at Corpus Christi Church, where Thomas Merton was received into the Catholic Church. In January each year Corpus Christi Church hosts a lecture commemorating Thomas Merton and another great spiritual writer, Henri Nouwen. Both Merton and Nouwen celebrated their birthdays in late January.

The true self is a central concept in much of the writings of Thomas Merton,

and many writers have also attempted to distill Merton's thinking on this subject, with Anne Carr's excellent volume, *A Search for Wisdom and Spirit: Thomas Merton's Theology of the Self*,¹ being particularly worthy of note. Martin's approach though is different as he takes Merton's writing on the true and false self and uses it to illustrate his own personal journey and the insight Merton's thinking gave to Martin in becoming who he is. Martin suggests a similar paradigm for his readers to enable them to become, in the words of his title, "who you are."

Approximately half of this short volume is dedicated to the insights Martin gained from Thomas Merton. There then follows a chapter on the lessons he learned from Henri Nouwen and subsequent chapters touch briefly on the lives of a variety of other saints, some modern—Mother Teresa, Dorothy Day, Jean Vanier, Pope John XXIII; and others more traditional—Saints Peter, Ignatius Loyola, Aloysius Gonzaga, Thérèse of Lisieux, Joan of Arc, Francis of Assisi, and Bernadette Soubirous.

Throughout this book Martin's understanding of the true and false self is underpinned by the thought of Thomas Merton. In his final chapter he recalls the advice given to Merton by his friend Robert Lax, and affirmed by his mentor Mark Van Doren, that his desire should not just be to become a "good catholic" but "to become a saint." (76-7) Martin uses Merton's writing well to get across his message that we are not meant to be a Mother Teresa or one of the other saints he mentions, we are meant "to be *yourself*" and the self we are meant to be is not the false self that "we present to the world" but our true self. For Martin this

true self is "the person we are before God" and our "sanctity consists in discovering who that person is and striving to become that person." (83) It is a deceptively simple message, but one that we all need to be reminded of. James Martin has a great gift of storytelling, especially integrating stories from his own life and the lives of the saints into his writings, and so he delivers this message simply and eloquently.

¹Anne Carr, *A Search for Wisdom and Spirit: Thomas Merton's Theology of the Self*. (Notre Dame, IN.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1988.)

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Encounters with Merton

Henri J. M. Nouwen
The Crossroad Publishing
Company, New York
ISBN 0824521498 \$14.95

The name Henri Nouwen on the cover is a good indication that a book is worth reading and probably worth buying, especially so when linked with the name Merton. However this book is not really new, having been written for original publication in 1970 and issued twice in English editions under different titles — in 1972 as *Pray to Live* and as *Thomas Merton: Contemplative Critic* in 1981.

In the present edition there has been some rearrangement of material and removal of lengthier quotes from Merton's