

vidual', authentic and fully human, whose numerous gifts continue to enrich us. The essays are followed by a list of contributors with a short biographical description of each.

On the whole, while I feel that exploring the theme of hope is of crucial importance to our times and *Seeds of Hope* contains a number of intriguing insights that can guide us through our personal and collective nights (my favorites were the contributions by Pearson, Thurston and Conner), I would have appreciated more disciplined writing with fewer rambling digressions where the aim seems to be to display the presenter's erudition.

**Malgorzata Poks** is the author of the recent *Thomas Merton and Latin America: A Consonance of Voices* and has delivered papers at the last two Thomas Merton Society Conferences in the U.K.

### A Meeting of Angels

The correspondence of Thomas Merton with Edward Deming & Faith Andrews

Edited by Paul M. Pearson

Broadstone Books

Frankfort, KY, 2008

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*Reviewed by Thea Van Dam*

**T**his correspondence, here published for the first time by Dr. Paul Pearson, follows seamlessly his earlier work on the Shaker Community entitled *Seeking Paradise*. The publication inevitably throws light on the personalities of the corre-

spondents and emphasises particularly, for us, Merton's great capacity for friendship, his compassion and enthusiasm to share his boundless knowledge.

In his introduction, Dr. Pearson gives us a brief but important history of the friendship between Edward Deming and Faith Andrews and Thomas Merton. His final paragraph gently offers us a treat in store:

In this volume of correspondence we are invited to partake with Thomas Merton and Edward Deming and Faith Andrews both in their enthusiasm and their affection, for the Shakers and for each other, and to join with them in the Communion of Saints and in the Shaker belief in the spiritual presence of their departed believers. Their correspondence manifests a rare meeting of spirits, indeed it is the celebration of a meeting of angels.

The letters follow. Edward Deming Andrews, already a leading Shaker scholar, had heard that Merton intended writing a book on the Shakers and he wrote to offer him support. Merton immediately expressed his appreciation of Andrews' work and told him of his deep interest in the Shaker spirit and Shaker craftsmanship. In his typical forthright manner, Merton wrote, 'Certainly a Cistercian ought to be in a good position to understand the Shaker spirit'. He assured Andrews of his full permission to quote him, '... if anything I have said can be of the slightest help, I will be delighted'. Merton stressed, 'I want to keep in touch'. In his

reply Andrews mentioned the support given him by their mutual friend, Mark van Doren, who taught Merton English at Columbia University.

Six months later, Merton wrote again and this time, he was characteristically in confessional mode, having taken on, as always, too much work. He mentioned the Shaker schoolboy desk in the hermitage as being 'a pure joy' and concluded, 'with my expression of my gratitude and friendship in the Spirit'. Andrews responded, 'I feel close to you as a person, and treasure the spirit which breathes through your letters'. Two months later, their one and only meeting took place. This meeting proved to be the flowering of a friendship which had already blossomed. Four days after their visit to Gethsemani, Andrews wrote, 'I wish it were possible to tell you how profoundly moved we were by the experience'.

There were no letters until late summer 1962 but the correspondence then was relaxed and intimate. They both wrote of Merton's delightful poem *Grace's House*. It is impossible, on reading these letters, not to consider how friendships might have developed between Merton and the many like-minded people he met during such an immensely full life, had he not been enclosed at Gethsemani. His letters show such understanding and empathy. And for Andrews, too, who wrote in November 1963, '... you have constantly been in my thoughts – always near, and always a true friend and guide'.

During 1964, Merton agreed to write an introduction to Andrews' book *Religion in Wood*. 'I would really be delighted to try an introduction. I love the Shakers and all that they have left us far too much to be able to say no...' Sadly, Andrews did

not live to see the introduction which Merton wrote but there are five letters between Merton and Faith Andrews about the beautiful preface to our book'. Merton's last letter to Faith, written on 20th April 1965, encapsulated his affection and concern for his friends individually, despite his heavy work load: 'I think often of you and of the book. Is it being published? I wonder if there is still anything I can do. This book must be published, it is so important. Best Easter wishes. Cordially in Christ'.

In the course of the correspondence, gifts in the form of books and pamphlets were exchanged between the friends. These include, from Merton, a mimeographed copy of *Peace in a Post-Christian Era*, sent to Andrews in 1962 and not published until 2004. And from Andrews, a catalogue of Shaker Inspirational Drawings, *Shaker Furniture* (E. D & F Andrews) and a silk screen reproduction of the *Tree of Life*, sent in 1964, which still hangs in the Hermitage.

The third section is devoted to thirty-two black and white photographs, taken by Merton, of the Shaker village at Pleasant Hill, Kentucky. These show both the exterior and the interior of the family dwellings, shops and offices and in them Merton has captured the beauty of the scenery and architecture. He recorded 'Marvellous, silent, vast spaces around the old buildings. Cold, pure light, and some grand trees... How the blank side of a frame house can be so completely beautiful I cannot imagine.' The photographs are followed by a review of Edward Deming Andrew's book *Shaker Furniture* by Ananda K. Coomaraswamy.

We are indebted to Dr. Paul Pearson for this delightful book which brings

Merton, as his friends knew him, so much closer to us.

**Thea van Dam** has been a member of TMS since its inception in December 1993 and was for some years, both secretary and treasurer of the Society.

### Contemplating God, Changing the World

Mario I. Aguilar  
SPCK, London, 2008  
ISBN 978-0-281-05832-7  
164 + xxiii pages  
£12.99

Reviewed by Peter Ellis

**T**he premise of this book is that contemplation and social action belong together and that Christians need to reconnect with the recognition that time spent with God in prayer and meditation makes us aware of his presence and will in the world. With great clarity Aguilar reiterates his basic theme throughout the book: 'prayer and contemplation lead to a political commitment, to a social responsibility and to political action', 'the measure of [our] contemplation is the extension of God's actions through [us] towards the poor', and so on.

The book starts with an exposition of the theme and a review of the relationship of politics and spirituality. Here we learn that Aguilar speaks with the authority of someone who has seen the brute face of the political, for he has experienced what followed the 1973 coup against Allende in Chile. His uncle was executed, members of his family fled, and he himself was

involved in a left wing cell from which people he knew were 'disappeared'.

The main section of the book is a series of thumbnail sketches of six individual lives, illustrating his theme in terms of real lived experience and real events. Merton leads the way followed by Ernesto Cardenal, Daniel Berrigan, Sheila Cassidy, Archbishop Desmond Tutu, and Mother Teresa. Each is, of course, quite different, there is no attempt to mould these lives into a hagiographic illustration of a series of points. But each followed a deep contemplative path and from each of them, according to Aguilar, God brought out responses to the world 'they had never thought they wanted to give in the first place'.

This leads on to the real argument of the book – that the work of a contemplative is not to separate spirit from body and to ascend a ladder away from the world, but to hear God's call to action in the world on behalf of the marginalized, the prisoners, the poor. This is open to all of us. When we turn to God in contemplation and prayer we turn our bodies as well as our spirits towards God. 'Contemplative bodies are transformed into bodies of resistance to...power, prestige and possessions'.

And, Aguilar argues, it is precisely in the eucharist that we are given the connection between our bodies and Jesus, between human and divine and between religion and politics. The eucharist is, as the liberation theologians and groups fighting for social justice have experienced it, actually a very real presence of community. In the eucharist the church comes together as a body where personal identity is no longer something to be grasped in distinction *from* other people