

The remaining two thirds of the book provide illuminating detail of the second half of Merton's life after entering the monastery. The chapters chart the significant outer events and the accompanying inner journey revealed in his writings.

We are provided with a sympathetic account of this man of paradoxes: his persistent and often restless search for solitude and his staggeringly profuse communication through letters and publications; a man who focused on the inner life of the spirit and engaged with critical issues in the outer political world; a man who withdrew from society into a tradition centuries old and yet continued to penetratingly address twentieth century preoccupations and dangerous misconceptions; a hermit who experienced an epiphany on a crowded street; a man for whom Christ remained the pivot of life and faith whilst seeking and offering wisdom and friendship across the divide of religions.

We are given a sensitive picture of a man of humour and compassion who battled throughout his life. We see how residence in a monastery provided no protection from opposition and temptation: the frustration of obedience when the Abbot General forbids the continuation of his writing on peace and war; the irritation with censors who edit his work and delay publication; the joy and heartache of a loving relationship and the unavoidable agonising choice between marriage and continuing his vocation as a monk.

So the list could go on for this is a biography that paints Merton as a spiritual writer whose insights are hewn out of contemplation which has serenity but also knows the depths of human travail. No wonder he is a man whose writings con-

tinue to inspire those who glimpse the transcendental as they struggle on their earthly journey with feet of clay.

The strength of allowing Merton's writings to portray the man could have been enhanced in places by greater authorial comment or analysis e.g. in exploring a link between the catastrophic loss of both parents before adulthood and his turbulent year at Cambridge.

The sources of the extensive quotations from Merton can be traced through the notes and a brief list of resources and web links is provided. But this book, that aspires to encourage its readers to seek out Merton's writings, disappointingly fails to provide a bibliography. This is an absorbing introduction to the man and his writings, it is accessible rather than academic and I would recommend it to anyone wishing to learn about Thomas Merton.

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**Professional Morality and Guilty Bystanding
Merton's *Conjectures*
and the Value of Work**

Barry L. Padgett
Cambridge Scholars Publishing,
Newcastle upon Tyne 2009
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Hardback 142 pages
£34.99

Reviewed by Melvyn Matthews

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way the book is of significance to both theologians and professional ethicists, to students of Merton and Alasdair MacIntyre.

How does this work out? After a short chapter on the nature of professional ethics and a brief introduction to Merton and the place of *Conjectures* in his personal development, Padgett provides us with an overview of moral theory and the nature of the professional life. In the course of this he begins to outline Merton's own position in relation to the different theories of ethics and points towards his reliance upon the existential tradition. This is followed by a long chapter on contemporary challenges in professional ethics which draws upon a great deal of interesting research. Once again Merton is seen as providing a critique of the way in which professional life tackles its moral dilemmas.

Padgett then asks us to consider the importance of moral imagination and the place of wisdom in moral activity, properly criticising, again with Merton's assistance, much of the shallowness of current professional practice. He ends with a stimulating and important chapter on the relationship between moral imagination and leadership.

There can be no doubt that we need all of this. My own view is that the book should be made compulsory reading for two groups of people. First of all are those who are caught up in the spirituality industry but are so introverted that they simply provide ammunition for those outside of the faith communities who see such intensity as a form of self indulgence. This group should be encouraged to link spirituality with the whole question of how we live now in the secularised

Justice Center of Bellarmine University in Louisville, Kentucky, in collaboration with the Thomas Merton Center of that University, hosted a conference on 'Merton and Moral Reflection in the Professions' which explored the implications of Thomas Merton's *Conjectures of a Guilty Bystander* for professional morality. Barry Padgett is Associate Professor of Philosophy at Bellarmine where he specialises in applied philosophy and teaches the Business Ethics component of the MBA programme. This book is his extended reflection on the relationship between Merton's thinking, especially as found in *Conjectures*, and the moral dilemmas of contemporary professional life.

As such it is an important book, a significant, welcome and almost overdue development in Merton studies, because it moves our thinking away from that rather tired concept, spirituality, and Merton's contribution to what we understand as spirituality (which has preoccupied us for too long), to the application of his thinking to the hard questions of our day. Can the cloistered monk make such a contribution or is his writing so explicitly religious and devotional, tied to an exposition of mysticism and so limited in its range that it cannot be read outside of the monastery?

But the interesting thing is that this book not only attempts to make a contribution to how we understand and apply Merton's spirituality in the present work context, it also attempts to enlarge our understanding of work itself and the way in which we tackle the ethical problems professional work throws up. So it is a contribution to both spheres in the belief that these two areas have become artificially divorced one from the other. In this

world we inhabit. But even more important it should be read by those who either have no ethical education for the workplace, who despise such a thing as unnecessary, or who have such a poor education that they simply collude in the bad faith which prevails in our professional life and which Padgett illustrates so well and so disturbingly.

In putting the book down I had two questions. The first is whether our society is so bad. Is professional life so caught up in playing games and ignoring the real profundities? I think on occasion Padgett's zeal to show that it is in need of redemption overwhelms him and he does not give any (or did I miss them?) examples of good practice amongst those who seek to find an ethical basis for professional life. He is so concerned to show that it needs Merton's insights that he is in danger of undervaluing what it already does. And that is unmertonesque.

The other question is about Merton's thinking. I am sure that Merton's understanding of the true self as against the false self of society is a necessary and essential component of a new understanding of ethical behaviour. Behaviour has to come from a deeper place. Padgett shows all that without a shadow of a doubt—as if we needed to be told. But is that enough? What I would like to see is all this worked out in far more detail, far more rationally and in terms which the professional ethicists could accept. Just *how* does 'the true self' make a difference? Just how does moral imagination work in this particular set of circumstances or in this particular institution? I think a lot more work has to be done in these areas otherwise all we are left with is a set of assertions or hopeful insights, like those

in the last pages of Padgett's book, all of which are beautiful and encouraging. But the professional world will need a lot more than that. Perhaps that is Professor Padgett's next project?

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Thich Nhat Hanh – Essential Writings

Edited by Robert Ellsberg
Darton. Longman and Todd
London, 2008
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£9.95

Reviewed by Lyn Ellis

On May 26 1966 a significant, but never to be repeated, meeting took place between Thich Nhat Hahn—the Vietnamese Buddhist monk—and his monastic 'brother' Thomas Merton. During this time together there was a mutual recognition that their spiritual practices shared many similarities, leading to a deepening understanding of their respective traditions. This early example of engaged spirituality within an atmosphere of self-disclosure, openness, and willingness to risk change, marked a sea-change in inter-religious dialogue.

This timely book, coming as it does to a world divided by religious intolerance and misunderstanding, provides guidance