

and lived words of Gerard Manley Hopkins: 'Let Him easter in us, be a dayspring to the dimness of us.' (*The Wreck of the Deutschland*)

**David Adam** was vicar of Holy Island from 1990-2003. He has been writing books on Celtic saints and prayer for well over 30 years. These include lives of Aidan, Cuthbert, Bede, Cedd, and the Voyage of Brendan. He is now retired and lives in Northumberland

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### **Much Ado about Something: A Vision of Christian Maturity**

Larry Culliford

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252pp ISBN 978-0-281-07362-7 (pbk) 252 pages

312.99

Thomas Merton, throughout his career as a contemplative practitioner, invited his readers to accompany him in discovering the mature Christian life through explorations of the meaning of human flourishing. *Much Ado about Something* is not specifically about Merton, but Larry Culliford reflects Merton's philosophy of human flourishing for the common good. Religions have been the traditional repositories of this philosophy by acknowledging the spiritual essence at the heart of material existence. Since the ratification of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights by the United Nations General Assembly in 1948 modern democratic societies have legally codified the dignity of the person as human rights, but religious wisdom, once the repository of human dignity, has either been relegated to the margins of public discourse or has been castigated as an ideology of political extremism.

*Much Ado about Something* counters scientism, a pseudo-faith in material rationality, by shining a scientific light on spiritual understanding. Culliford brings to his study a refreshingly interdisciplinary approach as based on his experience as a psychiatrist and as a practicing Christian of deep personal faith. Culliford's exploration of faith maturity is evidence-based as he extrapolates the significance of flourishing for an integrated self from case studies over his 25 years as a clinician.

Culliford's proposition on human flourishing challenges the dominance of scientism to argue that spiritual maturity necessitates the agency to face, rather than to evade, personal doubt and uncertainty, a position profoundly counter-cultural. Culliford supports his argument by

drawing upon world religions in order to introduce his readers to traditions of contemplative practices that help to facilitate spiritual awakening. The literary device Culliford uses to frame and anchor his study is an overarching 'arc of life' that makes visible the process of an evolving spiritual maturity at different stages along a typical life cycle from infancy to old age. He covers six stages of spiritual development: egocentric, conditioning, conformist, individual, integration, and universal. Culliford alludes to interconnections between spiritual inhibitions at an early stage of this life arc and social ills. For example, fundamentalism is explained in terms of the 'egocentric stage' leader and the 'conformist stage' followers (p. 111). In contrast, Culliford equates spiritual maturity with the instinct to participate in the flourishing of others (p. 171).

This book is brimming with ideas about the nature of personhood, but too many are cursively skimmed rather than sifted and refined. That said, however, Culliford's case study approach gives his writing an authenticity and an intimacy making his book a pleasurable read that can be put down and taken up without losing the thread of his argument. The clarity of approach in this book and the implications of the author's ideas for personal and social well-being should attract a readership that includes those seeking insights into their own spiritual life; those with an interest in mental health, spirituality and the human brain; and those with pastoral roles. *Much Ado about Something* is timely and relevant for today's war-weary world wracked by atrocities too frequently misunderstood as being perpetrated as sacred causes.

**James G. R. Cronin**, University College Cork, Ireland. (See James Cronin's article on pages 61-68)

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### **The Way of the Hermit: Interfaith Encounters in Silence and Prayer**

Mario I Aguilar

Jessica Kingsley Publishers, London, 2017

ISBN 978-1-7859-2089-9 (pbk) 208 pages

£16.99

Mario Aguilar is Professor of Religion and Politics in the University of St Andrews and a prolific author. He was born in Chile but had to leave the country after being arrested by the Pinochet regime. He studied in Louvain and went as a Divine Word Missionary to Africa. His academic