

Book Reviews

Guard the Human Image for it is the Image of God:

Essays on Thomas Merton

Gary Hall and Detlev Cuntz (eds)

Münsterschwarzach, Vier-Türme-Verlag GmbH, 2019

ISBN 978-3-7365-0260-4 (pbk) 135 pages

£15.53

This book records the 50th year commemoration of Merton's death in a symposium held at Münsterschwarzach Abbey in Germany in January 2019. Having the opening welcoming remarks by Abbot Michael Reepen, a message from Kentucky to participants by Paul Pearson, and the text of the final eucharistic address by Wunibald Müller, bilingual and playfully as though by Merton himself, the reader gets the feel of what must have been a friendly and enjoyable occasion. Also included are the text and images from a relaxed guided meditation by Detlev Cuntz and Paul Pearson on one of the afternoons. Shorter talks included a moving appeal by Anselm Grün, set at the start of the conference, to always seek a kinder and more healing way of addressing each other than the aggressive and brutal language so common today, together with a discussion by Kosmas Lars Thielmann of the friendly contacts between Romano Guardini and Thomas Merton. Guardini died in the same year as Merton and so shared this 50-year commemoration, but Karl Barth shared not just the date but the same day.

Barth rightly dominates here with three of the papers looking at his legacy and contrasting him with Merton. The first of these papers (by Andreas Ebert) is an exploration of some of Merton's 'big dreams', ones that Jung saw as archetypal dreams that not only carry a significance in the lives of the dreamer but also seem to take on wider resonances that both touch us individually and also symbolise the times we have lived and are living in. The dreams about the girl he called Proverb are seen as evoking Merton's inner work towards integrating his anima, or female

side, and is tied in with his relationship at that time with M. (Incidentally it is something of a shock to see the convention of referring to her as M disregarded here by giving her full name.) Other dreams are also dissected, as well as Merton's comments on Barth's dream about his interview with Mozart, and Mozart's disturbingly silent responses. This latter dream is taken on by Gary Hall as part of his exploration of Merton's *Conjectures*, looking at the attempt there to bring together the personal and the political without diminishing one's full openness to either. There is, here, a particular focus on God as an active and dynamic presence 'breaking in' on the lives, dreams and experiences of Merton and Barth. This links with Bonnie Thurston's paper earlier in the book which tells directly of God's presence in meditation and eremitical life, looking particularly at the idea that in the marginal wilderness, outside ordinary society, one is acting as a guest both to the divine and to the world as they break in on us. Her sense of hospitality chimes well with the welcoming theme of the conference.

Ashley Cocksworth's paper is the third to follow the theme of Merton and Barth. His paper asks the question whether 'Barth needs Merton more than Merton needs Barth'. Looking at changes in the fifty years since Merton's death it is fascinating to see that a statement like that would have been impossible in 1968 but can be convincingly asked, and agreed with, in 2020. The question is not intended to grade the two in importance but to prioritise instead the sharing of human needs. Barth saw it as natural and right to construct a written edifice from which he personally was absent, while Merton the individual is, of course, all over his writing. Today we can no longer create exterior worlds which exclude inner ones. That being said, Cocksworth's text is sympathetic to both its subjects in the context of their day. The final paper by Małgorzata Poks continues her ongoing exploration of the *Geography of Lograire*. Here the suggestion is made that new thinking about the 'other', about human hatred of animals, about racism and especially about colonialism allow us to see new meanings in this great poem. Or, put another way, we can't yet talk about Merton's legacy because since he was so ahead of his times we may still not fully know it. The violent voices in *Lograire* have been for many a major difficulty. With Poks' help it can now be seen that, in occupying these voices, Merton recognizes that the white man has to accept and inhabit his past which Merton takes right back to its prefiguration in the foundational biblical account of Cain's murder of Abel. Poks suggests that the poem as a whole is about the promise of universal salvation – the colonialist white man's being, historically, the

salvation most difficult to foresee. She suggests that the form that salvation might take would be best shown by accepting contact with the disturbing other, for instance with the maltreated animal. It's a paper well worth reading that opens up *Lograire* anew.

Finally it should be said that the book has some troubles with misprints, especially in Merton's original texts quoted in Ebert's paper on his dreams. The word breaks at line endings can be surprising and presumably result from the German typesetting software used.

Peter Ellis is a retired archaeologist, and an enthusiastic follower of Merton. He has a special interest in animals and would like to see the human/animal debate in Christian anthropology moving toward a more creaturely posthumanism.

Writing Straight with Crooked Lines: A Memoir

Jim Forest

Orbis Books, Maryknoll, NY, 2020

ISBN: 9781626983571 [pbk], 336 pages

ASIN: B0869G4NY5 [e-book]

£21.66

Jim Forest has spent a lifetime in the cause of peace and reconciliation. In this welcome memoir he tells his own story through his intimate encounters with some of the great peacemakers of our time, including Dorothy Day, Thomas Merton, Daniel Berrigan, Henri Nouwen, and Thich Nhat Hanh. Forest, the son of ardent American communists, chronicles his personal journey that led to his enlistment in the U.S. Navy, and then his discharge as a conscientious objector following his conversion to Catholicism. Initially joining the Catholic Worker community in New York he went on to play a key role in mobilizing religious protest against the Vietnam War, and served a year in prison for his role in destroying draft records in Milwaukee. But his journey continued, including extensive travels in Russia in the last years of the USSR, his reception into the Orthodox Church, and his work as the author of over a dozen books on spirituality and peacemaking including biographies of Day, Merton, and Berrigan.

Forest's memoir offers valuable insights for readers interested in the history of popular protest in general and American pacifism in particular. Readers familiar with the history of dissent are aware that Forest is a