

this case, to ponder the meaning of the “hidden ground of Love” for my own life and living.

There are indeed multiple ways of reading *A Life in Letters*. We can read its letters for spiritual insight (as I tend to do). We also can read them to discover more about Merton’s many interests, about his amazing epistolary friends, and about the times in which he and his contemporaries lived. So much valuable information is in the letters. Here, we are exposed to a Merton who can write freely without worry about the censors from his Order who examined all of his works intended for publication – but not his letters.

*A Life in Letters* is for me a book truly to be enjoyed. In an unscientific experiment, before reading *A Life in Letters*, I wrote down six of my “favorite” Merton letters, taking into account Shannon and Bochen and their editorial emphasis on “scope and variety” (xiii). I was certain there would be some overlap between my short list and the letters selected by Shannon and Bochen, but to my surprise all half dozen of my “favorites” were included in *A Life in Letters*.

In addition to the letters to Pope John XXIII and to Chakravarty, I had included in my list Merton’s January 1966 letter to Abdul Aziz explaining his daily life at his hermitage; his February 1966 letter to Jim Forest encouraging Forest not to worry about results in the peace movement but rather to focus on simply being faithful in his witness; his January 1961 letter to Doña Luisa Coomaraswamy calling for some in their troubled times to be “sacraments” or signs of peace; and finally, his April 1968 letter to his Quaker friend June Yungblut expressing his deep sorrow over the murder of Martin Luther King, Jr. All these precious letters are in *A Life in Letters*. My hunch, almost to a certainty, is that Shannon and Bochen also have included most if not all of the letters that readers of this review might put on their list of “favorite” Merton letters.

Every book, of course, has its limitations and *A Life in Letters* is no exception. For example, I would like to have seen the complete text of some selections included only in abridged versions in the five collected volumes and sometimes further abridged here. The texts in their entirety are found in the Thomas Merton Center archives and could be made available (barring any problems with permission to print). By reading a small sample of Merton’s letters in their unedited versions, we could gain an even greater sense that what we are reading are “real” letters. Of course, we would be exposed to some of the more mundane and inconsequential parts

of Merton’s letters, but this would help humanize the letters even more for Merton readers.

A second criticism is more an expression of hope. I would like to see the printing of a companion to *A Life in Letters* that might be entitled something like *Letters between Merton and His Friends: The Essential Collection*. Although there have been a number of volumes including both sides of a correspondence, for example the letters of Merton and Boris Pasternak, and the exchange of letters between Merton and Rosemary Radford Ruether, there has yet to appear something comparable to *A Life in Letters* which would represent “an essential collection” of both sides of Merton’s correspondence in a single volume. Those found on the other end of Merton’s letters are often as fascinating and spiritually astute as Merton. With exposure to both sides of the correspondence, we could experience more directly the dialogical nature of letter writing which Merton himself so valued and cherished.

In sum, *A Life in Letters* should be added immediately to any personal or institutional library of Merton’s basic works. In addition, I would recommend reading *A Life in Letters* as the place to start for anyone who wants to explore Thomas Merton as a letter writer. Evelyn Waugh was correct in his assessment of Merton’s abilities as a master of correspondence and he remains so today. Who could have ever imagined, however, that Merton’s “apostolate of friendship” in letters, initiated a half century ago, would now appear in our mailboxes – as fresh and new as ever.

William Apel

MERTON, Thomas, *A Book of Hours*, edited with an Introduction by Kathleen Deignan, Foreword by James Finley, illustrations by John Giuliani (Notre Dame, IN: Sorin Books, 2007), pp. 224. ISBN 978-1-933495-05-7 (cloth) \$18.95.

Through this magnificent *Book of Hours*, Thomas Merton guides the prayers of an “active contemplative” for one week – if one uses it as Kathleen Deignan intended. Deignan has selected texts from Merton’s mountainous corpus and arranged them into seven daily, meditative readings. Each day’s reading is further divided into texts for dawn, day, dusk, and night. The book was inspired by the “Book of Hours” format first made popular in Europe throughout the Middle Ages, and which is now commonplace in the devotional life of the Church (hence the title: this is merely *A Book of Hours*).

It is not an academic or theological treatise, nor is it a systematic exposition of contemplation or the hours. Deignan does not even dictate how one reads this book. It is, instead, a call to listen for God in silence, prayer, and contemplation.

While this book is mostly the product of Deignan's imagination, she was not alone in creating it. The book opens with an autobiographical foreword by James Finley, in which he discusses his experiences with Merton and his writing. As it is common for Books of Hours to be illustrated, Deignan again partnered with John Giuliani (the two previously collaborated to produce *When the Trees Say Nothing: Writings on Nature* [Notre Dame, IN: Sorin Books, 2003]), who provides subtle, beautiful illustrations throughout the course of the book. Most were images of the sun and moon – increasing the reader's sensitivity to the ebb and flow of nature. Giuliani also provided creative input on the nature of the text itself.

Deignan, however, is really our mentor through this book. Growing out of her own prayer life and *lectio divina* through the texts of Thomas Merton, this project sought to fashion an invitation to "a different wisdom" (16). The book prepares the contemplative "to embrace the world" (27) in a way that reveals one's true self – putting falsity and illusions in check and seeing the world as it really is. Deignan's shaping of the form and function of Merton's words renders her in some ways more influential even than Merton here. It is she who creatively fills silent times with Merton's thoughts.

The book begins with a lengthy (27 pages) and theologically rich introduction that Deignan framed around the theme of praise. Here she introduced the essence of Merton's theology, and explained many common motifs according to their connection to the praise of God. As a transition into the text, the introduction cleverly ends with a treatment of time – the importance of the present – in the Christian life. Deignan reminds us that time is really "a sacrament, a medium of encounter with divinity" (33).

The texts are as varied as Merton's interests. Deignan drew from Merton's poetry, meditative prose, and social writing. Most of the selections from Merton are affable and approachable; the language presented in this book (with few exceptions) becomes that of a prayerful monk who lets us experience God alongside him. Each day's selection stands alone as its own entity, complete with themes, ideas, etc., but there is a progression that works throughout the week – moving from Sunday praise to Saturday

reflection. There were, however, a few recurring themes throughout the book: the pregnant nature of silence; the practice of contemplation; the creative power of humanity; Mary as theological figure, intercessor, and metaphor; the prison of clutter to which we subordinate our lives. Not surprisingly, given Merton's surroundings at Gethsemani and Deignan's past editorial project (*When the Trees Say Nothing*), many of the readings have to do with nature and its lauding theology.

Throughout the book Deignan offers to the reader a unique and inviting premise: Merton was a psalmist – both in poetry and prose. Addressing God from the perspective of one who is aware of God's presence in the experience of prayer, those "found" psalms make up this book. As follows, Deignan labeled each section of the text into both established genres (canticle, hymn, psalm, lesson, examen, etc.) and innovative classifications ("Breath Prayer," modeled after the Buddhist *gatha* and early Christian monologistic prayer). She transforms the genre of a variety of Merton's writings into Scriptures that facilitate contemplation. Given his Trappist tradition and research interests, the Psalter was the most influential book of the Bible for Merton. *A Book of Hours* is a Psalter of his own.

My only "critique" of this beautiful book would be the length of the readings. At times the passages present too much for the contemplative to experience in one sitting; this is especially true with the dusk texts. The length of the readings does, however, have its benefits: one can pray these texts repeatedly without monotony. Also, the longer readings provide especially good sources for *lectio divina*. Regardless, the goal of these selections was prayer, not complete retention of theological ideas.

The popularity of *A Book of Hours* has necessitated multiple printings, and the book is currently selling quite well. It is easy to see why. The book is an indicting reminder of how cluttered everyday life is for most "active contemplatives." For busy professionals, finding a few minutes four times a day can be a bit of a challenge, especially during the workday (graciously, the day texts did tend to be a bit shorter). This book, however, reminds us that it is possible to structure contemplative elements into everyday life. Hope is not lost even in this cluttered world.

I would recommend reading this book in a number of different contexts. The book could be a great primer on Merton, but would be most helpful for someone at "*le point vierge*," eager to experience God through guided silence. The book was intended

for a varied audience: lay readers, those who are relatively new to Merton, Merton enthusiasts, Merton scholars, and anyone else who longs for Merton's accompaniment in prayer and contemplation. Often when someone asks me for a recommendation of a book by Merton, I am at a loss to narrow the options down to only one. I think I have now found it.

Matthew Emile Vaughan

PADGETT, Barry L., *Professional Morality and Guilty Bystanding: Merton's Conjectures and the Value of Work* (Newcastle upon Tyne, UK: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2009), pp. xii + 142. ISBN: 978-1-4438-0245-1 (cloth) £34.99.

This is a good book, and a challenging one. I found it challenging because of its dense writing style, and its long expositions of a number of approaches to philosophical ethics, unfamiliar to me, but not something to wonder at, given that the author is a philosopher with a strong interest in the ethics of the professions and of business.

The book originated in a conference on "Merton and Moral Reflection in the Professions" co-sponsored by Bellarmine University's Ethics and Social Justice Center and the Thomas Merton Center in March 2006, which explored Merton's *Conjectures of a Guilty Bystander* (1966) as a launch-pad for reflecting on professional morality. Interestingly, the event was inspired by the real-world story of Dr. Linda Peeno, "whose experience as a medical reviewer for a major health insurance corporation is depicted in the movie *Damaged Care*" (vii), in which she quotes Merton. Her experience as an ethically-challenged professional was also picked up by Michael Moore in his film *Sicko*.

Padgett's foundational assertion in the book is that contemplation, "as Merton understands it, facilitates the maturation of character and lays the foundation for wisdom" (viii), two dimensions of personality which he finds (as do I) in short supply in our culture. He does not define Merton's view of contemplation, but in various ways he points to it. Contemplation, in Merton's view and practice, involves "cultivating a deep inner spirituality from which one [can] critically encounter the world" (4). It requires meditation on one's "profound recognition of a unity of the self with others" (37). It serves "as a safeguard against over-identification of self with work" (74). Sometimes Padgett identifies "dialectic" as a

companion activity to contemplation, and sometimes he presents it as a feature of contemplation: in neither case is his use of the term clear, to me at least. In relation to morally-informed leadership, contemplation becomes "an extended call to action" (99); and all of these dimensions are nourished and integrated by the commitment to solitude and silence which is its matrix.

A new thought to me was the author's assertion that the concept of a profession, and of its members as professionals, is comparatively recent: he gives the time-frame for this as the past 70 years. A profession, he says, requires specific training, gives personal autonomy to its members, involves its members in public service, and is characterized by adherence to an ethical code. I find this framing a little stretched, since for centuries we have had lawyers and doctors and so on; but I take his time-frame to refer not so much to the existence of the professions as to their professionalization, so to speak, through the creation of professional associations and their adoption of ethical codes. (I note that he does not refer to the clergy as a profession, not that I would argue with him about this, inasmuch as among the clergy are found both those to whom his fourfold pattern does apply and those to whose ministries of a charismatic kind it does not. The clerical cohort is too much of a wild animal to fit into this particular corral!)

Padgett summarizes for us the ethical theories of the big-name theorists: Plato, Aristotle, Hobbes, Bentham, Kant, Nietzsche, Ayn Rand, Sartre and MacIntyre. Not surprisingly, he discovers that although Merton holds certain positions which some of these writers hold, he withholds allegiance from any one of them. Rather, Merton advocates the centrality of love as it is understood in the Christian tradition as the keystone of his contemplative ethics. In particular, he rejects the "heresy of individualism" (27; *Conjectures* 143), which isolates the self from its essential oneness with all other selves, God included, and which results in the vulnerability of the fragile individual self to fragmentation. Conversely, Merton holds up the ideal of a unity with others realized in an unsentimental love which proceeds to action (32-33).

This contemplative position is what Padgett takes as Merton's most important contribution to professional ethics. Because in contemplation we find ourselves standing before the mystery of the self, we must acknowledge that we cannot absolutize or privilege that self, which we will never fully comprehend, as any ultimate criterion of value or judgment. It is this relativization of our own