

times, Merton still considered his essential vocation to have been that of a solitary. He judged that all his speech and writing about God had been impertinent except for the writing in which he praised God out of his silences...

With great discernment Montaldo has mined Merton's journals for such writing. Nearly half of the meditations are from the later 'hermitage years' and this emphasis is, I think, what gives the selection such depth and lucidity.

I initially approached this book with a degree of resistance. I am not usually attracted to the 'Thought for the Day' format. This volume, however, contains vintage Merton, and the quality of the selection transcends the limitations of the genre.

I probably wouldn't use it on a daily basis but, bookmarked for quick and easy access to some of Merton's finest writings on silence, solitude and the presence of God, this is certainly a book to have by you.

Heather Lyons

Seek the Silences with Thomas Merton: Reflections on Identity, Community and Transformative Action, Charles R Ringma, (London: SPCK, 2003), pp. xxv + 229, ISBN 0281056048. £9.99

Merton's writing is most vibrant where he is seeking words to capture and communicate the adventure of living a committed and intentional life: The living was the thing, distilled through the particularity of a poetic, unifying love of language and fired by

a yearning to communicate and bear witness. Merton could not have been 'only a writer', less still an academic.

So with Charles Ringma, the appeal of this book is the anticipation of writing emerging from international experience of urban mission, community development and work amidst poverty. That he is also professor of mission and evangelism is an interesting bonus. One anticipates, as with Merton, spiritual reflections born of the tensions and struggles of raw human existence. The autobiographical passages are not so raw, but do serve to highlight the tensions and insights in which we may recognize the presence and action of God.

Throughout this book, 'Merton is only a conversation partner' (xv). Ringma makes clear that these are his own reflections, which happen to 'resonate with many of Merton's concerns'. This is not a book about Merton. Neither is it another selection of Merton quotations: There is only one, usually a sentence or two, in each meditation. *Seek the Silences* is designed as a handbook, a point of reference and an encouragement for a life of evangelical service, of mission arising from contemplation of scripture. It is designed with the formation of practitioners in mind – of those who probably 'wouldn't take time to read a volume of systematic theology'. If Merton is one conversation partner, then the reader is another. We are invited to reflective dialogue in the midst of committed praxis.

Merton quotations – indeed, some of Merton's most poignant – connect and

resonate with Ringma's own meditations, though don't necessarily add much to the essence of a passage. That Ringma has published similar books 'with' Henri Nouwen, Jacques Ellul and Dietrich Bonhoeffer suggests that the prime focus is not the 'conversation partner', and that the monk's name in the title could be misleading. However, the book will not disappoint many who do appreciate Merton. There is a brief chronology of Merton's life (with some errors) and a selective bibliography – both intended for the reader unfamiliar with Merton, and both oddly curtailed. An annotated bibliography would have been particularly helpful in a book of this nature.

The heart of *Seek the Silences* is a collection of short passages (one to one-and-a-half pages) organized under six sections: the search for... self-identity; ultimate meaning; friendship and community; a prophetic voice; transformative action; an eschatological vision. Within and across these sections, themes are interwoven and repeated as variations (themes such as aloneness, listening, community, friendship), which gives the book a journey-like structure. It is at the same time easy to dip into without losing a sense of continuity.

I found most stimulating those passages where Ringma explores directly the motivational centre out of which we, individually or corporately, live, choose, and act – or are prevented from choosing and acting. (Interestingly, *My Argument with the Gestapo* – possibly Merton's most vivid engagement with this theme – is not referred to).

Persistent hope and sharp critique give shape to timely questions for a church in a period of rapid evolution amidst perceived social crisis.

This is above all a testimony of committed ecumenical discipleship and a reflection upon Protestant evangelical spirituality and praxis. I would commend this book especially to those Protestant practitioners in whose tradition Ringma is grounded, and hope that they too catch the enthusiasm for Merton's legacy that Ringma clearly has.

Gary Hall

Tom's Book: To Granny With Tom's Best Love 1916, Ruth Merton, edited by Sheila Milton (Monterey, KY: Larkspur Press, 2005), [Unpaged.]

Thomas Merton's mother, Ruth Merton (1887-1921) was his first biographer. For his first two years she kept a "baby book" to send to her mother-in-law, Tom's maternal grandmother in New Zealand. Very few documents have survived from Merton's early years so this document is quite remarkable and gives us information about the early years of this equally remarkable man.

This beautiful volume, a limited, fine press edition has been edited by Sheila Milton who introduces Ruth's text with a most informative introduction revealing much about Ruth Merton that has long been forgotten. Her portrait of Ruth balances the negative image of her found in a number of biographies. The attention to detail and care found in the baby book Ruth kept about Tom witnesses clearly to her love for Tom,