

and many writers have also attempted to distill Merton's thinking on this subject, with Anne Carr's excellent volume, *A Search for Wisdom and Spirit: Thomas Merton's Theology of the Self*,¹ being particularly worthy of note. Martin's approach though is different as he takes Merton's writing on the true and false self and uses it to illustrate his own personal journey and the insight Merton's thinking gave to Martin in becoming who he is. Martin suggests a similar paradigm for his readers to enable them to become, in the words of his title, "who you are."

Approximately half of this short volume is dedicated to the insights Martin gained from Thomas Merton. There then follows a chapter on the lessons he learned from Henri Nouwen and subsequent chapters touch briefly on the lives of a variety of other saints, some modern—Mother Teresa, Dorothy Day, Jean Vanier, Pope John XXIII; and others more traditional—Saints Peter, Ignatius Loyola, Aloysius Gonzaga, Thérèse of Lisieux, Joan of Arc, Francis of Assisi, and Bernadette Soubirous.

Throughout this book Martin's understanding of the true and false self is underpinned by the thought of Thomas Merton. In his final chapter he recalls the advice given to Merton by his friend Robert Lax, and affirmed by his mentor Mark Van Doren, that his desire should not just be to become a "good catholic" but "to become a saint." (76-7) Martin uses Merton's writing well to get across his message that we are not meant to be a Mother Teresa or one of the other saints he mentions, we are meant "to be *yourself*" and the self we are meant to be is not the false self that "we present to the world" but our true self. For Martin this

true self is "the person we are before God" and our "sanctity consists in discovering who that person is and striving to become that person." (83) It is a deceptively simple message, but one that we all need to be reminded of. James Martin has a great gift of storytelling, especially integrating stories from his own life and the lives of the saints into his writings, and so he delivers this message simply and eloquently.

¹Anne Carr, *A Search for Wisdom and Spirit: Thomas Merton's Theology of the Self*. (Notre Dame, IN.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1988.)

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Encounters with Merton

Henri J. M. Nouwen
The Crossroad Publishing
Company, New York
ISBN 0824521498 \$14.95

The name Henri Nouwen on the cover is a good indication that a book is worth reading and probably worth buying, especially so when linked with the name Merton. However this book is not really new, having been written for original publication in 1970 and issued twice in English editions under different titles — in 1972 as *Pray to Live* and as *Thomas Merton: Contemplative Critic* in 1981.

In the present edition there has been some rearrangement of material and removal of lengthier quotes from Merton's

work which was not readily available when the book was first published, but it contains no new material. The book's stated purpose is as 'an introduction to the life and thought of Thomas Merton' (p.19).

A short biography of Merton at the beginning of the book was presumably written for the original publication which was within two years of his death, and perhaps for this reason is too reverential and cries out for drastic updating by the editors. The plaster saint immune to temptation and devoid of flaws, who sailed serenely through academic training and into a Cistercian monastery from where he contentedly dispersed spiritual wisdom and guidance to the world, will no doubt raise a wry smile and shake of the head by seasoned Merton scholars, but could result in a failed or false start for new enquirers.

John Eudes Bamberger, a fellow monk, and friend of both Merton and Nouwen wrote in a preface to the second edition to the book (1981), 'much remains to be done. . . . It will be many more years before anything approaching a more definitive study of Merton can be written'. (p.11). Since 1970 much has been done and published and it is the 'much' not included in this book which limits its use as an introduction.

Having said that, although the encounter has been with a limited amount of Merton's work, the fruits are often pure gold and Nouwen identifies and clarifies some of the hard truths which Merton confronted and which anyone serious about their faith must also confront. These include, 'It is not important to live for contemplation, but for God' (p.70); 'non-violence is not the searching for

results but the inherent quality of spiritual unity'(p.101); 'Merton understood that the unmasking of illusion belonged to the essence of the contemplative life' (p.89).

Nouwen, who describes Merton as 'the man who has inspired me most in recent years' (p.19) has similar gifts and abilities to Merton. Paul Pearson commented in this Journal that Merton and Nouwen 'are increasingly referred to in the same breath in discussions about the impact of twentieth century spiritual writers'. (vol.9, no1., p.39). Nouwen the contemplative reflecting on Merton the contemplative gives us something greater than the individual work of either writer and this gives the book a value which is more than its intended purpose.

Encounters with Merton would be a good read for a quiet day or retreat, or to be chewed over in slow meditative reading.

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A Sunday in Hell: Fables and Poems

Daniel Berrigan

New York and Charlottetown:

Bunim and Bannigan, 2006.

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Although Daniel Berrigan ranked high in Thomas Merton's esteem, they drew apart in 1968 due to Merton's reaction against the anti-war protests that both Daniel and Philip Berrigan had under-