

register is not there; we get only booming statements in primary colours, shakily expressed. For Mark Shaw, Merton at the end, all thanks to Margie, had 'reached the perfection' of his 'new rebirth'. As for most of us, Merton's voyage towards spiritual maturity within the monastic life was a bit more complicated. Shaw has no sense that it might be something like layers sliding off an onion, with each disillusionment contributing to a widening and deepening sense of his personal frailty becoming rooted in God's mercy and love.

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Spiritual Masters For All Seasons

Michael Ford
HiddenSpring (Paulist Press)
Mahwah, New Jersey, 2009
ISBN 97815817680557
(pbk) 176 pages
\$18.00

Michael Ford, writer, theologian and broadcaster, here presents four celebrated Christian writers, theologians, broadcasters—and spiritual masters—of the twentieth century. The book was 'largely inspired' by Ford's visit to the Abbey of Gethsemani, and Merton takes centre-stage in the company of Henri Nouwen,

Anthony de Mello and John O'Donahue. The relatively brief but informative and lively introductions to these spiritual celebrities are framed by the author's own journey in their shadow or under their wing. Therein lies the book's coherence. Ford writes well of the dynamic of spiritual searching in relation to another writer's spiritual searching. His source material includes the fruit of interviews and research undertaken for a BBC programme marking the fortieth anniversary of Merton's death, interviews with Nouwen and O'Donahue and with people who knew de Mello.

The interview material gives the book its particular texture, not least the highlighted conversation with Rowan Williams about Merton, 'the man nobody knows who has that strange recurring theme of disappearing' (p.65). Generally, the book's four subjects are each treated separately, with the exception of ten pages in which Merton and Nouwen are compared and contrasted: 'There was no doubt that Thomas Merton's writings meant a great deal to Henri Nouwen. But anybody who thinks that Nouwen was the Merton of his generation either did not know Henri or did not know Merton' (John Eudes Bamberger, cited on p.93).

Why this book now? These four male, twentieth-century, English-speaking, late ordained Catholic writers are presented as 'for all seasons'. But this is a book responding to a particular moment in American history, the inauguration of Barack Obama as President: 'I began to sense that the four writers... could offer, in counterpoint, a spiritual accompaniment to the emerging political melody' (p.15). Perhaps they could. A year

on, the political melody seems a little different, and I wonder whether the book's prelude might need to be remodelled. Or whether the perspective might seem a little alien to readers living outside the USA. That aside, this is a well-researched and engaging celebration of men whose literary and religious work has helped sustain many pilgrims through complex times, and it is made all the richer by Ford's threading his own pilgrimage into the story, whilst inviting us to do the same.

Mission-Shaped Hermit:

Thomas Merton, Mission and Spirituality

Keith James
Grove Books Limited,
Cambridge UK, 2009
ISBN 9781851747122
ISSN 0262799X
(pbk) 28 pages
£3.50

Grove Booklets, 'written by practitioners not theorists' are concise introductions to aspects of Christian life and ministry. Keith James' recent contribution to Grove's 'Spirituality' series is, more specifically, a constructive and critical response to the movement represented by the Church of England's *Mission-Shaped Church* report (Church House Publishing, 2003).

So this is a booklet perhaps directed primarily towards mission-oriented readers unfamiliar with Merton. The reflective questions concluding each brief section would work well with members of mission-oriented local UK congregations, as they invite the reader to consider the heart of mission, growth, discipleship or

church life in relation to selected passages or themes from Merton's life and writing.

James makes the point, for example, that Merton would not regard a church full of apparently Christian (even 'mission-shaped') people as a goal of the Christian life, but would instead tend to emphasise such things as continuous conversion from delusion (p.7)—the inner transformation implied by *conversatio morum*.

Anxiety about congregational decline can distort discipleship and relationship (p.11). In contrast with reactionary programme-led activism, mission—*missio Dei*—may arise from attention, from listening in expectation, or entering into the mystery of human encounter: 'Merton's genius was simply to remind and demonstrate for a new generation of people why silence, contemplation and action belong together' (p.16).

Some well-selected quotations, thoughtfully framed, make this a booklet I would happily work through with a group serious about church and discipleship. It is a welcome addition to the continuing flurry of 'mission-shaped' publications, and may lead some into a closer reading of both Merton and postmodern mission. As an introduction to Merton himself, it is somewhat limited and includes a couple of questionable assertions (Did Merton's 'turn towards the world' arise from his celebrated Louisville episode? What was the 'third conversion' in 1965?). The final section on 'beginning to read Thomas Merton' is also thin—alas making no mention of the TMS or the Merton Journal—but does highlight one of the best introductory Merton compilations, that of Christine Bochen.

I for one am grateful to Keith James for

bringing Merton to the 'mission-shaped' table, where I hope he will be welcomed and heard.

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The God You Already Know

Edited by Henry Morgan & Roy Gregory
SPCK

London 2009

ISBN 9780281061556

(pbk) 223 pages

£10.99

The Greenbelt festival has been held at the end of August every year since 1973. Thousands of people with a wide range of Christian involvement gather together over a weekend for a stimulating array of spiritual, artistic, musical, intellectual, culinary and social activities. I have never attended this event myself, but I know some people who have, and they describe an invigorating and liberating milieu for the creative, open minded exploration of Christian themes. Henry Morgan and Roy Gregory have worked together in 'Soul Space', a setting within the festival for reflection, prayer and spiritual direction. They say, 'At Soul Space we have seen at first hand a spiritual hunger that does not seem to be much met by the church structures that are currently in place'. Out of this experience they have compiled *The God You Already Know*, a resource book for people to dip into (rather than read straight through), and to use whatever speaks to