

with some important unresolved questions is less a shortcoming of the book itself than a reminder of the scale of the task ahead of us.

David Golemboski

LOOTENS, Dominiek, *Open to the Full Dimension: Thomas Merton, Practical Theology, & Pastoral Practice* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2022), pp. xxvii, 115. ISBN 978-1-6667-9174-7 (paper) \$23.00.

Catholic practical theologian Dominiek Lootens, a Merton Society member currently working in Germany, introduces Thomas Merton into the formation of practical theologians in their various professional contexts, such as healthcare, interfaith dialogue, adult education, etc. The Merton whom Lootens introduces is the contemplative-prophetic, which effectively becomes a foundational theme throughout the book. Lootens not only declares this to be the foundational theme. He chooses a wondrous array of Merton texts to weave the theme throughout the chapters. By doing this, Lootens sets up Merton to be spiritual guide and director in the formation and development process. For example, this is explicit in the chapter, “Thomas Merton and Pastoral Supervision” (29-52). Lootens begins by introducing the reader to a text on pastoral supervision by Jane Leach and Michael Paterson, who describe pastoral supervision as “attention and transformation” (30-31). Appropriately, Lootens links this with Merton’s focus on contemplation and action, i.e. the contemplative-prophetic foundation of the book. Attention and transformation are both process and result of the contemplative life and work, which characterize the Merton so well known to many. Lootens employs this Mertonian contemplative-prophetic foundation to engage specific and various work contexts.

Through seven chapters Lootens borrows from his own experience guiding the reader to watch Merton (through texts) engage practical theologians in their work contexts. For example, we see Merton dealing with Catholic chaplaincy in multi-faith encounters, migration, civil rights, social justice, adult education, our natural world, peace and even more. Merton is a wonderful conversation partner in all of these contexts because he has thought deeply and written extensively about every one of these areas. Even better, as Lootens ably demonstrates, Merton’s foundational contemplative-prophetic perspective serves to spice the conversation with a flavor that was usually missing in the contemplative practitioner’s original education and training. Once again, Merton is relevant on into the twenty-first century

Hence, if for no other reason, Lootens’ book is worthy to read simply to see how he uses Merton as a “conversation partner” in a creative,

relevant fashion to excite the learning and development of practical theologians' professional growth. Personal and professional growth assumes one does not learn it all in a limited educational period at school, supplemented by some kind of apprentice-type applied training. Growth is a life-long endeavor. To this point, more than once Lootens references the hermeneutical method of theologian Margaret Miles and her notion of "reading for life"¹ (xxv, 19). Actually it is more than mere reading. It is reflecting and joining others in conversation with attention and the hope of transformation. It is also prayer and exercising other spiritual disciplines. As noted, Lootens personalizes the whole process by bringing in his own experience of doing this work in three different jobs in two European Union countries, Belgium and Germany. He is clear that his aim is to help practical theologians learn and continue to practice ongoing theological reflection in their professional work. In this reflective process Merton becomes an invaluable conversation partner.

The contemplative-prophetic foundation Merton brings to the conversation with the pastoral practitioners in their various contexts is shaped by particular modes of engagement. Four such modes are characteristic of Lootens' perspective. They are mutuality, friendship, dialogical and non-hierarchical. Clearly, these facilitate and support each other. The mode of mutuality within a particular context, such as interfaith work, recognizes that all participants are respected, valued and share power to be heard. More than once Lootens reminds the reader that Merton claimed a "ministry of friendship" (34).² Lootens encourages the pastoral practitioner to choose the friendship mode of presence in his or her work. The dialogical mode suggests a posture of openness and listening, which means the professional practitioner is present as learner and not simply as expert who tells. Finally, the non-hierarchical mode not only flattens relationships, but fosters inclusion and power-sharing. Interestingly, these modes are similarly at stake in the synodality process being facilitated by Pope Francis.

Lootens' book is an important read for all those who want more Merton and for all applied practitioners who should continue to find ways to be theologically reflective in their working context and who want more guidance than the latest management fad from the business world. The book is informative and challenging. Becoming grounded in a contempla-

1. Margaret Miles, *Reading for Life: Beauty, Pluralism, and Responsibility* (New York: Continuum, 1997).

2. Thomas Merton, *The Hidden Ground of Love: Letters on Religious Experience and Social Concerns*, ed. William H. Shannon (New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 1985) 482 (November 10, 1958 letter to Pope John XXIII).

tive life with a prophetic commitment is challenging and will challenge the status quo in most professional contexts. At the same time, Lootens' book is both promising and refreshing. It is promising because we can take heart from Lootens' own experience of using Merton for his own theological reflection in his own professional contexts in Belgium and Germany. Lootens introduces some of the best scholarship and practices to enhance ongoing professional development for the practical theologian. This is refreshing because it can breathe a new spirit into both work and life. Finally, Lootens' book is important because it is birthed on the European continent with work contexts located there. This underscores Merton's own global life and continuing global relevancy.

Alan Kolp

DENNY, Steven A., *The Merton Prayer: An Exercise in Authenticity*, Photographs by Stephen L. Huffman (Chicago: ACTA, 2022), pp. ix, 182. ISBN: 978-0-87946-703-6 (cloth) \$24.95; 978-0-87946-717-3 (paper) \$19.95.

In the acknowledgments section of his new book, author Steven Denny expresses surprise, shared by his publisher, that no one had previously taken a "deep dive" (180) into what is probably the most widely familiar of Thomas Merton's writings, the prayer that begins "My Lord God, I have no idea where I am going."¹ Fortunately Denny has taken the plunge, and the resulting volume is replete with various "pearls of wisdom" drawn from reflections on the text of the poem, from related scriptural verses and from anecdotes of the author's own experience.

Denny is perhaps an unlikely, or at least unexpected, advocate and commentator for the prayer. Born into an evangelical Kentucky family, he was ordained a minister at an early age after attending bible college and became an enthusiast for biblical and eventually other ancient mid-eastern languages who went on to study at the University of Chicago until it became evident that positions in academia for his specialty would be virtually unavailable. After serving as a patient advocate in a Chicago hospital he eventually went to law school, and for nearly three decades he has committed himself to pursuing the rights of the poor and marginalized in his one-person law firm with its motto of "Striving for Justice in an Imperfect World" (177), while continuing to serve in various positions in local Protestant congregations and ministries. This rather unusual combination of clerical and scholarly formation and a legal practice

1. Thomas Merton, *Thoughts in Solitude* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Cudahy, 1958) 83 (subsequent reference will be cited as "TS" parenthetically in the text).