

Review

Reviewed Work(s): Thomas Merton: Preview of an Asian Journey by Walter Capps

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page 140, but apparently without understanding its significance for Luther) and the contrast between God's two kingdoms as the key to his political and social ethics. In view of the abundance of literature on these subjects—some in Lage's bibliography—this omission is hard to understand. It leads him to assert: "Luther makes little effort to advocate that Christians perform good works, for fear of having it understood as supporting justification by works" (137 f.). The evidence against this observation is overwhelming. One may only consider Luther's two catechisms, which were considered so important that they became part of the Lutheran confession, the *Book of Concord*, a distinction shared by only one other of Luther's writings, *The Smalcald Articles*. And the insistence on good works as the result of justification permeates his preaching to an extent that Lage's claim seems simply bizarre.

Thus the author comes to the conclusion that Luther's claim that in the Christian life works follow faith, based on the notion that the good tree produces good fruits, provides little guidance for the adherents of Luther's theology. He asserts: "One's relationship to God comes to be seen as having priority over one's relationship to the neighbor, *to the point of its exclusion*" (155, italics the reviewer's). This is said about the man who wrote: "Faith brings you to Christ and makes Him your own with all that He has; Love gives you to your neighbor with all that you have" (WA, 10, I(2) 38, 2 Advent 1522). A few years later he wrote again: "It is there [in the neighbor] God is to be found and loved, there He is to be served and ministered to, whoever wishes to minister to Him and serve Him; so that the commandment of the love of God is brought down in its entirety into the love of the neighbor. . . . For this was the reason why He put off the form of God and took on the form of a servant, that He might draw down our love for Him and fasten it on our neighbor." (WA 17, II, 99, 18 Lent 1525) Reading this very expensive book you may learn something about late medieval theology but little if anything about Luther.

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Walter Capps, *Thomas Merton: Preview of an Asian Journey*, NY: Crossroad Pub. Co, 1989, pp. 114, HB, \$13.95.

This compilation of Merton's talks and essays from the late 1960s proves refreshingly contemporary in the discussion of such topics as world religions, monasticism, the decline of the American city, and our eroding ecol-

ogy. The first essay, *The Sacred City*, focuses on the Mesoamerican civilization of the Oaxaca Valley in what is now southwest Mexico. He posits that these archaic people were more in tune with God because they were a sensual people who were not tied to the intellectual abstractions of modern society.

In his second essay, *The Wild Places*, Merton's concerns for contemporary theology are expressed in what he notices as an ambivalence towards nature that is rooted in the Judeo-Christian heritage. He traces a trend of picturing the wilderness as a symbol of moral wickedness which awaits to be conquered or tamed by man. Yet, Merton reminds us that in the 19th Century, the Transcendentalists located God in the forests and mountains surrounding the city. Writers such as Thoreau and naturalists such as John Muir are portrayed as the last of the spiritual thinkers who regarded nature as an essential source of renewal of the psyche.

But what we must be most appreciative of Capps for including is the *Center Dialogue* in which Merton gives a talk previous to his fatal Asian journey. In this talk, Merton discusses the similarities between Eastern and Western religions, the issues concerning contemporary mysticism, and the state of the secular world. We hear the echo of Merton's voice in brilliant exchange with a group of students, a dialogue that is transcribed virtually verbatim.

Capps's introduction also gives insights into Merton's comments on monasticism in his later visits to Calcutta, some accounts about his relationship with W. H. Ferry, and the situation of the author at the time of his publication *Zen and the Birds of Appetite*. The book reminds us how Thomas Merton was years ahead of his time as a thinker and as a communicator.

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