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 A PERSONAL INTERPRETATION: ANTHONY PADOVANO'S *HUMAN JOURNEY*



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It should be noted first of all that this book is a paperback release of a previously published hardcover edition. There have been no additions to the book. *THE HUMAN JOURNEY* is Padovano's personal interpretation of Merton and his writings.

Chapter One gives a reflective overview of Merton's life and writings; the subsequent chapters center on themes that could be described as follows: Merton the writer, non-violence, prayer, childhood, youth, technology and Zen. The author gathers material related to each theme and uses it to reinforce his own interpretation of Merton.

In an assertion typical of the book's approach, Padovano writes about the person of Merton: "Conflict energizes him; resolution undoes him. Again the paradox. The man who sought peace in the Abbey of Gethsemani was happy as long as his vocation gave him little peace (page 58)." Regarding Merton's thought, he asserts: "We have seen that Merton insists that prayer be improved not by technique but by expanding and enriching human experience. The naturalness in prayer is evident in Merton's answer to the problem of distraction. People who have no distractions, he wisely observes, do not know how to pray (page 90)." Finally, in a sweeping interpretation of Merton's entire life and work, the author states: "The key to Merton's thought resided in a close examination of his own life. He had a sense that an answer to the dilemmas of the century lay in himself (page 104)."

In short, the book is provocative; the author makes assertions regarding Merton's life and work that are often controversial. This demands that the reader critically evaluate these interpretations by comparing them with prior knowledge of Merton. Whether one agrees or disagrees with Padovano's assertions, the effort to process his conclusions leads to an increase in understanding of Merton.

I found this book very enjoyable. I recommend it primarily to those who are already familiar with the life and writing of Merton and have come to some personal conclusions regarding both; since the work is so subjective, it needs to be balanced by the reader's personal knowledge of Merton. Granted this, I believe it should be read and reflected on by anyone seriously interested in Merton.