

MERTON THE DREAMER

Review of

Melvyn Matthews

THE HIDDEN JOURNEY:

REFLECTIONS ON A DREAM BY THOMAS MERTON

London: Collins/ Fount Paperbacks, 1989

157 pages / £3.50 paperback

Reviewed by **Paul M. Pearson**

Melvyn Matthews, an Anglican priest and director of the Ammerdown Centre for Study and Renewal, has written, in his first book since *Delighting in God*, a series of extended reflections on themes that were suggested by a dream recounted by Thomas Merton in *Conjectures of a Guilty Bystander*. He begins by quoting this dream in its entirety and then moves on to talk about the hidden life and how his understanding of it were influenced by an elderly lady in hospital, before he proceeds to use certain phrases from Merton's dream to reflect on and illustrate ideas about this hidden journey.

Essential to the thought of this book is the theme that prayer or the hidden journey is basic to human experience. Within each of us there is an inner music and it is often the poets, novelists and counsellors of our day who are most in touch with this music. Matthews believes that we are called to listen to this music which will draw out of us prayer and consciousness of the divine life within: "The poet is the one who 'remembers' and who by his speaking arouses his hearers, reawakens in them faded memories and sends them out on a journey into the true reality of the divine" (p. 46).

Drawing on six phrases from Merton's dream, Matthews reflects on different areas of the hidden journey. First, we are called to set out. There is a human instinct for journey and, like Abraham, we all receive an invitation from God to go in search of the promised land. In the second phrase, he explores the loneliness that this journey involves, and how we move from loneliness to solitude, a dark part of the journey where we come to realize, in the words of Francis Thompson, that the gloom is "but the shade of Thy hand, outstretched caressingly" (p. 71). In the third and fourth phrases he looks at some of the hindrances to this journey, the false beliefs that acquisition of possessions will provide us with the good life and that work is a means of life rather than being a source of life. Underlying Matthews' writing here is a lot of Merton's thought on the dangers of a technological society, individualism, and the need to possess, as well as ideas from other sources — John of the Cross, Karl Marx, and Pope John Paul II, to name but a few.

The fifth area he looks at is liturgy, how worship is a part of the music of the deep, still, hidden journey and how the eucharist in particular opens us up to receive and to give love. The final area he deals with is more specifically concerned with prayer. He stresses the importance of

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prayer, which is so often overlooked, and suggests that it is not like some long forgotten language but is, in fact, our mother tongue and is connected with who we really are and thus is crucial to our hidden journey. Prayer, Matthews says, is concerned "with being before God, with standing, as Theophan says, 'with the mind in the heart before the face of the living God'" (p. 143).

Throughout this book, Matthews relies heavily, if not always explicitly, on many key areas of Merton's thought. He also brings in a host of other writers as well as examples from his own pastoral experience which go to ground this book in reality and make it very readable, though, at times, his theme seemed a bit eclectic and disjointed. It is an encouraging book and I am sure that Merton would approve of his presentations of prayer as essential to the fabric of life and that all of creation can and should be a part of prayer.

MERTON THE PEACEMAKER

Review of

John Dear

OUR GOD IS NONVIOLENT:

WITNESSES IN THE STRUGGLE FOR PEACE & JUSTICE

New York: Pilgrim Press, 1990

113 pages / \$8.95 paperback

Reviewed by **Barbara Sonnenberg**

How ironic that as I write this review George Bush and Mikhail Gorbachev are completing their highly successful summit meetings in Washington. How Thomas Merton must be celebrating in absentia! While world leaders are expected to produce high blown rhetoric and exorbitant claims, today's news media is full of comments by ordinary citizens declaring the Cold War to be over. The signing of agreements reducing long range nuclear missiles, cutting chemical weapon stockpiles, and stopping the production of poison gas seem to prove their point. So, if these claims be true, of what interest — other than historical — is a new book on nonviolence?

Perhaps Jesuit peace activist John Dear's unique approach to nonviolence as a personal decision and his



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