

there is a work to be done in the world, . . . that can be done only by the contemplative . . . one who is the doer of one's own deeds" (p. (28), and this generates the "social thought" and, finally, involvement with myriads of others. This overview is a good start, but it is sketchy and while it should help others to appreciate Merton, other scholars (Carr, Kilcourse) have packed more into their analyses.

Shannon's story sets a different goal: this is a story which is focused, not on crises, or writing, or monastic patterns), but rather on the essential movements of Merton's life, which are "moments of conversion" (p.7). These are high points revealing the trajectory. Much of this selected material has to be what we've heard before. Thus, of 14 chapters, the first 6 chronicle the years before entering Gethsemani. No doubt important, this is one more distillation.

Shannon's book includes sections which are chronologies of events which are interspersed throughout the text. (Thus, in addition to the 14 chapters there are 8 separate chronologies. Shannon's intent is to show Merton's significant events in relation to the significant events of the world.) Shannon suggests that these sections can be skimmed, or ignored. In fact, they are annoying, as they are interspersed. They might better have been made into an Appendix.

The value of Shannon's "story" is that it shows how Merton kept working to be a better monk, writer, christian, ecumenist, etc. In the chapter about war, race, monastic renewal and religions of the world, Shannon successfully demonstrates critical moments of awareness which did change Merton (and continue to make readers aware and perhaps be changed also).

Shannon's book is a guidebook. Sometimes we wish for more. For example, he provides laudatory comments about the essay "Notes for a Philosophy of Solitude," suggesting it is one of the best pieces Merton wrote, yet Shannon declines much commentary by saying, "the best advice I can give the reader at this point is to read this essay in its entirety"(p. 160). There are generous quotations from Merton's writing throughout this study, yet the sheer amount of Merton's writing finally seems to overwhelm Shannon's attempt to tell the "Merton story." There are, perhaps, too many stories. But those books will assist readers to go back to all these books and letters. Curiously, there is little in either of these books about Merton the poet. It could be that the real mystic story is revealed there.

VICTOR A. KRAMER

THE SPIRITUAL LIFE OF CHILDREN by Robert Coles. *Harper Collins*, London, 1992, £9.99.

This is the final volume of three studies by Robert Coles, professor of psychiatry and medical humanities at Harvard University, who has worked for many years with troubled and disadvantaged children. Its companion volumes are on the moral and political life of children. Some of the source

material for this book goes back to the 1950s, gathered in the course of other investigations, while some was recorded specifically with the present study in mind.

The text links together extensive extracts from tape recordings of numerous children mainly aged 8–12, talking individually to the author or holding group discussions among themselves about their religious feelings and values. Some of these narratives are deeply moving: e.g. a little girl in a Brazilian slum whose mother is dying and turns her articulate rage about her people's poverty upon Jesus, the interviewer, and the parish priest; or a previously athletic boy confined with polio in an iron lung, whose terror of sudden death gradually gave way to courageous reflection about his religion and values, and renewed hope as he began to recover. It was in fact very striking how often group discussions, in particular, suddenly widened and deepened when one of the children began to talk about a bereavement or serious illness.

Many of the children interviewed are Christians, of a wide denominational and social spectrum, and their spirituality comes across with particular clarity, as does a strong sense of the impact that membership of different religious communities has had in shaping it. Jewish (mainly American and Israeli), Moslem (mainly Asian in London), native American Hopi, and 'secular' (American) children were also extensively interviewed, with almost equally vivid results, giving a lively and rounded picture of their spirituality in almost every case. It is difficult to convey what rich material this is; for the sake of the transcripts this is a book that rewards reflection.

Several themes cropped up repeatedly, regardless of the children's religious or social background. All, even the 'secular' children, thought deeply and often about God or (with the Hopi) Spirit, and many found prayer a challenging, comforting, and intensely real form of inward conversation. There were fascinating chapters on the Face and Voice of God, illustrated with colour drawings. Very many of the children, apart from Jewish and Moslem children forbidden to picture God too literally, had a sense of intermittent contact with a special comforting, guiding, or protecting face (not body), usually felt to be above themselves (e.g. in the sky). Virtually all the children who prayed or thought deeply about their values talked about listening to the voice of God, having a sense of union with all natural things, and having an exquisite sense of concern about other people and the rest of creation. When pressed about what they were in fact listening to with this Voice (e.g. were they hallucinating?), some of the children described how it wasn't exactly audible, was certainly not their own voice, but wasn't their parents' or teachers' either, though sometimes the latter said similar things. This voice cautioned against selfishness; was concerned about goodness and sin; advocated sparing and thinking about other people; sometimes got children out of danger with a sudden warning, sustained them in frightening situations, and comforted them in suffering. Many of the children were struggling to reconcile a developing sense of their own beliefs and values with those of

their parents (who often differed anyway), religious leaders, and other respected elders. Many, including 'secular' children, made a clear distinction between superficial religious observance or 'goodness' and real attitudes of concern towards God and other people.

Reading this book, I had the very strong impression that Robert Coles is uneasy with expressions of religious feeling and has little sympathy with organized religion of any kind, which contrasts very strongly with the natural and intensely involved way in which the children he recorded themselves viewed such matters. He seems well aware of this, and describes at length how he came to embark upon this particular book, armed with a self-avowed tendency to psychologize almost anything, and with a standard grounding in broadly Freudian views about the functioning of children's minds that did not help very much in understanding religious feeling. It is a tribute to the compelling strength of the children's narratives that constant intrusive reminders of the author's own unease don't seem to matter too much. Indeed, the reader is given occasional glimpses of an incipient thaw in Coles's attitudes, and a few of the children seem to have tackled him very effectively when he refused to commit himself when challenged about his own opinions.

Many more questions are raised by such a book than even begin to be answered by it. What is the relationship between the religious sense and morality, which are so constantly connected in children's minds? Or between religious/spiritual and psychological perspectives? It may be a hopeless task to try to reconcile classical Freudian psychoanalysis and spirituality without denigrating the latter, and I think this is implicit in the way the whole issue is left hanging in this book. Object-Relations psychoanalytic ideas are less difficult to integrate with it, but are foreign to Coles's way of thinking—there is, for instance, an impressive degree of conceptual congruence between the experience of God as described by Christian/Jewish/Moslem children in this book; what the Hopi children described as Spirit, what secular children experience as promptings of conscience, and what Object Relations psychoanalysis would describe as experience of a Good Object. There is much undigested food for thought in this very worthwhile book.

DAPHNE BRIGGS

BULTMANN by David Fergusson, *Outstanding Christian Thinkers Series*, editor Brian Davies OP, *Geoffrey Chapman*, London, 1992. pp. xxi + 154.

This introduction to Bultmann's life and thought admirably meets the editorial intention that books in this series should provide clear, authoritative and critical accounts of what great Christian thinkers have said and whether they provide a vision to live by, make sense, and can be preached.

It opens somewhat unexpectedly with an extensive bibliography of