

*The Blue Sapphire of the Mind: Notes for a Contemplative Ecology.* By Douglas E. Christie. New York: Oxford University, 2013. Pp. xv + 464. \$29.95.

The title of Christie's book derives from a desert father, Evagrius. The phrase refers to the graced and encompassing awareness of being immersed in the all. C. had earlier written a highly regarded book about the desert fathers, *The Word in the Desert: Scripture and the Quest for Holiness in Early Christian Monasticism* (1993). But as he notes in this more recent book, he had neglected to pay sufficient attention in that earlier book to the environment of early Christian monasticism, its rootedness in the desert as its settled place. C. came to see that places have moods. They also call for our attention, rootedness, and connection.

The present book is a beautifully crafted, scholarly treatise—dense in places but profound. It is a veritable feast: subtle, creative, probing—a book not just to read but to savor and meditate upon. In his attempt to build up a contemplative ecology C. mirrors something akin to Pope Francis's "integral ecology" (*Laudato si'*) and notes that we cannot have a spiritual center without also being rooted in a geographical one. Life is not characterized by being cut off from individual organisms but rather consists of networks or webs of interacting life forms. Like Pope Francis, C. sees a need for a spiritual transformation to address our ecological crisis: "The shared sense is that the ecological crisis (which is also a cultural and political crisis) we are facing in this moment is at its deepest level spiritual in character and that our response to this crisis will require of us nothing less than a spiritual transformation" (17).

C. organizes his ecological spiritual meditations around the topics found in desert spirituality: *Penthos*, the gift of tears for our broken world and the loss of so many species; *topos*, being situated yet estranged from our place or home; *prosoche*, the art of attention; *logos*, the song of the world; *eros*, intimacy and reciprocity; *kenosis*, emptiness; and *telos*, our lure toward paradise. The book echoes both a love and wonder for the natural world and a deep appreciation for the Christian contemplative tradition.

C. calls us to gain a sense of our world as both sacred and threatened, even desecrated. He knows the hard work necessary to face our grief and acknowledge our own habits of carelessness and inattention to the natural world. We are called to learn to look at the land which surrounds us not as its possessor but as a companion. In his chapter on *penthos*, C. asks whether we can truly learn to grieve over the losses of our natural world. He recognizes that tears are a gift. He also knows that losses not fully faced and mourned (like the loss of so many species) can lead one to fall under the spell of numbness and cruelty. The failure to mourn on the scale of the whole community often entails, as a consequence, repression, apathy, deadness, and lethargy—a refusal to really see.

The chapter entitled *topos* recalls that we are both "at home" and also, as the early monks knew, always a stranger in the world. Place-making itself is a form of contemplative practice. *Prosoche* (paying attention) reminds us of the challenge of learning to see the places we inhabit in all their vibrancy, beauty, and power and to value them in other than purely utilitarian terms. To learn to pay attention to the world we inhabit we

need to apprentice ourselves to those who do see a holistic connection to the world. C. turns, then, not only to the desert fathers or contemplatives (he mines the works of Eckhart, Antony, Evagrius, Augustine, and Thomas Merton), but also to Darwin, for whom he claims a kind of spirituality in his amazement at the beauty of that which was being formed in nature. C. also looks at Thoreau, John Muir, and Aldo Leopold as people who saw a holistic connection to the world.

C. draws on his own personal wilderness experiences. He also finds in poets and other thinkers rich resources for a contemplative ecology. For instance he cites Czeslaw Milosz's references to the idea of *apokatastasis panton* or "the renewal of all things." Milosz never ceased struggling with the radical ambiguity of existence, the sense that nature is at once sacrament and harbinger of death. Yet he stood within a tradition that is tenacious in trying to discover the ground for an authentic hope in the face of this ambiguous reality. Milosz had previously made the confession, "I belong to those who believe in *apokatastasis*. / That word promises reverse movement, . . . / It means restoration. So believed Gregory of Nyssa, / Johannes Scotus Erigena, Ruysbroeck, and William Blake" (312).

I cannot recommend highly enough a prayerful, contemplative reading of C.'s profound meditation and reflections on a contemplative ecology and what it entails for finding our true spiritual depths.

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*Self-Possession: Being at Home in Conscious Performance.* By Mark D. Morelli. Boston: Lonergan Research Institute at Boston College, 2015. Pp. xvi + 342. \$28.95.

How do you review a book that you have massively marked up and underlined? Like my worn copy of Bernard Lonergan's *Insight* (the 1957 edition), I will hold on to Morelli's new volume for its significant contribution to coming to know myself. While barely mentioning Lonergan, the meditations and reflections here aim at what *Insight* aimed at, the self-appropriation of the human subject in his or her conscious activities.

M. begins with the basic transcendental notions of meaning, objectivity, truth, reality, and value, and illustrates that we cannot get around the basic commitment implicit in these notions. We are, in fact, inescapably committed to them even if we explicitly deny them. We cannot meaningfully militate against meaning, or truthfully hold that there is no truth, or commit ourselves to the value of the valueless. By the very thrust of our being we are committed to these notions even if in our explicit knowing and acting we contradict this basic commitment of our being.

M.'s point is that the ancient challenge of self-knowledge goes on along with and underlies the other challenges in the conscious flow of life—and that it behooves us to clarify this deepest of challenges. Very helpful on this journey is a language of conscious performance analysis (CPA)—a mouthful, but extremely important as we attempt to