

and the true self: "Genuine autonomy is found only in self-forgetfulness . . ." (10).

Finally, Lawrence Cunningham has written what is not only a superb introduction to this collection of writings, but a penetrating literary and theological introduction to Merton's life and work. An opening section sketches the broad lines of Merton's life, explicating both its American and cosmopolitan dimensions. There follows a section on Merton "The Monk" in which Cunningham argues that monasticism, a fundamental way of being a Christian, is the interpretative key to understanding the many Mertons. "Thomas Merton as Theologian" explains Merton's dual theological education: the official Neo-Scholastic manuals of his studies for the priesthood and his voracious reading in monastic and mystical literature. Cunningham argues for Merton as a monastic theologian, attempting to know the self in order to know God, focusing on the *experience* of God's loving presence, struggling to bridge the gap between "theology" and "spirituality," between head and heart. A section on "Merton the Social Critic" explains Merton's social involvement as intrinsic to his evolved understanding of monastic life: "His life was to be a 'No!' to everything that hid the beauty of [the] world as it came from the hands of God and had been redeemed in Christ" (44). In "Merton and the East," Cunningham presents Merton as a new kind of monk, extending the boundaries of the contemplative life, reaching for levels of spiritual development which are "universally recognizable" though culturally and doctrinally diverse (46). A final section considers Merton as a "Spiritual Master," a great teacher who has mastered a doctrine and a way of life. I cannot think of any interested reader—from novice to master—who will not learn much from this introduction.

Thomas M. King, S.J. *Merton Mystic at the Center of America*. Collegeville: The Liturgical Press/Michael Glazier Books, 1992 [vol. 14, *The Way of the Christian Mystics*]. 160 pages. \$12.95 paperback.

Reviewed by Annice Callahan, R.S.C.J.

This book on Thomas Merton as a mystic at the center of North America reveals the unity of his spirituality. It discusses four basic

themes in his writings: the self, contemplation, freedom, and other people.

In the section exploring Merton's notion of the self, King notes some of the developmental changes that Merton underwent as a Trappist monk: an initial attraction to the monastic goal of immersion in the anonymity of the group; his inner conflict as writer and monk; his growing acceptance of his identity as writer and monk; his defence of autonomy; the death of his secular ego and of his religious identity through a Zen immersion in the anonymity of nature and immediate experience; a movement from a philosophy of the individual to a contemplative sense of the person; a recognition of the need for the human development of an ego-identity before an emphasis on its loss; the contrast between the empirical ego or false self and the true inner self nourished by transcendent experience (1-36).

In the chapter on contemplation, King distinguishes three forms of contemplation about which Merton wrote: metaphysical, natural, and infused. I particularly appreciated King's discussion of Merton's belief that metaphysical intuition of the ground of being is a form of natural contemplation, and that it is foundational for the Christian life. At the same time King is careful to observe the differences that Merton perceived between a metaphysical intuition and infused contemplation (37-52). I also appreciated King's reflections on *The Ascent to Truth* and the revised *New Seeds of Contemplation* in which Merton affirmed the primacy of intellectual knowledge in the act of contemplation over and against an anti-rational notion of mysticism (52-64). I found King's review of Merton's notions of Paradise and the Fall uncritical in view of our postmodern understanding of the new story of creation and of the emergent universe (64-68). I valued King's emphasis on Merton's unitive approach to contemplation in art and life (64-75).

King portrays well Merton's prophetic insight into several potential sources of our contemporary North American unfreedom: attachment to our social identity and to social conformity; mass movements; technological culture; propaganda; slavery to our appetites (86-96). He also delineates how religion and art can be sources of deliverance according to Merton (93-96). I agree that Merton remained resolutely theistic throughout his writings and even in his dialogue with Zen (103-04).

I wondered why the third chapter on freedom was not put first since it contains so much biographical material. In face of the data

presented in recent reliable Merton biographies by such authors as Monica Furlong, Michael Mott, Anthony Padovano, and William Shannon, I was surprised by the tentativeness of the author's conceding the possibility that Merton had fathered a child (77).

In the final section, "Others," King explores three paradoxes in Merton's life: the lack of opposition between solitude and society; between contemplation and action; and between monasticism and the concerns of society. Merton came to realize that solitude can heal the fictional self constructed by the anonymous crowd so that our true self can find community in Christ. He considered the hidden ground of love based on a personal experience of God to be the point of communion for ecumenical and interfaith dialogue (107-20). Merton came to see the unity between contemplation and action not only as a charism but also as the movement of finding our creative freedom in God to act on our own and to do the work of God in the world (121-29). His first fervor at having become a monk separate from the world gave way to his final conviction that a monk is intimately in the world. He also concluded that the monastic ideal of peace of heart had become a national need (129-40).

The epilogue captures the challenge that Merton offered North America. He raised a prophetic voice that affirmed the value of mysticism as a way to, and form of, social justice.

As a Jesuit and a theologian, Thomas King is sensitive in chapter 3 to Merton's integration of faith and North American culture. In chapter 4, he indicates ways that Merton promoted justice in the service of faith. In the epilogue, this theologian names the paschal mystery of Merton's surrender, his *suscipe*, letting go of his speech, identity, freedom, and community of friends to find these gifts transformed.

This clear and concise book is a significant contribution to the burgeoning corpus of secondary literature on Merton. It covers a great deal of ground in limited space. It combines frequent citation of Merton and reflective appraisal on King's part. The focus on four themes offers a frame for understanding Merton's experiences and images of himself, God, monasticism, the Catholic Church in ecumenical and interfaith dialogue, and North American culture. At the same time, it serves as a helpful introduction to Merton's life, writings, and themes of his spirituality. It will be a valuable resource for undergraduate and graduate students, teachers, scholars, and others wanting to learn more about Merton, monasticism, the Roman Catholic Church in North

America, and North American culture. The bibliographical apparatus at the back is simple and straightforward. It invites us to be mystics in and of North America.

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William H. Shannon *Silent Lamp: The Thomas Merton Story*. New York: Crossroad, 1992. 304 pages. \$22.95.

Reviewed by Francis Kline, O.C.S.O.

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### ***Jamais Vu: A Thomas Merton We Have Not Seen***

William H. Shannon calls Thomas Merton "easily the most important and influential writer on the life of the spirit in the twentieth century" (13). If this is so, one must welcome this new book into the virtual library on Merton and discover on what shelf in that variegated room it might go.

The book turns out to be a unique study. The author calls it a "reflective biography" (7), because he chooses carefully significant events and experiences of Merton's life to organize his thoughts and to guide his considerations toward some definite statements about his subject. Shannon's work does not replace and, indeed, does not approach in literary elegance Michael Mott's exhaustive biography *The Seven Mountains of Thomas Merton* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1984), but it does assume the advantage of consulting all that has already been written in order to forge some new convictions about Merton. Shannon's book has the perspective of time. His purpose is nothing less than to trace the development of Merton's spiritual journey. For Merton's was not just a boat with wild sails on an open sea, but a sturdy bark with a powerful engine determined to reach the appointed shore. Certain of his circumstances, he designed his ship and furnished it and occasionally offered it some serious frustration. But on the whole, Merton was a fortunate man—even a chosen vessel, whose course was marked out for him long before he realized it. One has to look deeper into the mystery of Merton's relationship with God in order to dis-