

Perhaps it is even more fruitless to hope to find Merton's 'real self' through studying a smattering of his dreams than by expecting to find it by reading just a seventh of his journals. Were dreams important for Merton? While he felt that it was a blessing he did not go at one point in his life to be analyzed by a psychologist, he does record them in his journal. Still, *pace* the editors who make no claim that this volume is the 'essence of' or the 'best of' Merton, I do think that they have succeeded in introducing us to the 'real' Merton, especially by their decision to include all his recorded dreams.

Merton undoubtedly is one of the most significant spiritual theologians of the twentieth century. More than that, though: he is the archetypal Everyman whose spiritual conflicts are our own, the ferryman who guides us across the waters to our own spiritual awakening. He teaches us to make sure that our path is intimately connected with our deepest love, to experience the sacred in our everyday lives and encounters, and then to gradually widen our circle of compassionate care to include all the world, none of which is alien to us.

Merton's celebration of love as a spiritual force that unites and binds all of life reveals his 'real self' and unlocks the door to ultimate reality, bringing closer that day when 'the whole world is reconciled to God in Christ'.

Leonard J. Biallas

CUNNINGHAM, Lawrence S., *Thomas Merton and the Monastic Vision* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), pp. xii + 228. ISBN 0-8028-0222-2. \$16.

Shortly after the publication in 1984 of Michael Mott's official biography of Thomas Merton I recall reading somewhere an observation by Father Timothy Kelly, then abbot of the Abbey of Gethsemani, that what still remained to be written was the story of Thomas Merton from an 'insider's' perspective. Sixteen years later, in the preface of this present volume, Father Timothy states, 'There is an adage that says, "It takes one to know one".' That, I believe is the source of the wisdom in this volume by Lawrence S. Cunningham' (p. vii). While not a professed member of a monastic community, Cunningham, a scholar of Christian spirituality and a member of the theology faculty of the University of Notre Dame, brings to his task the knowledge, experience, and sensitivity needed to grasp firmly 'the monastic vision' of Thomas Merton.

Cunningham makes it quite clear that he is not interested in rehearsing yet again the generic story of the life and works of Thomas Merton. The author states, 'My intention is to begin my study of Merton where major autobiography ends off, i.e., with his entrance into, and full embrace of, monastic life. My story begins there because of a deep personal conviction, stated in more than one place, that if one does not understand Merton as a monk, one does not understand Merton at all' (pp. 16-17). The uniqueness of this book and the significant contribution it makes to 'Merton studies' is the perspective of understanding Merton as a monk. Throughout the entire book this is the lens through which Cunningham views Thomas Merton.

This book is part of a series, 'Library of Religious Biography', which emphasizes careful scholarship without footnotes and academic jargon. As such, it is deceptively simple. There are eight chapters of almost equal length, the last being a very

helpful annotated bibliographical survey of works by and about Merton. The chapters unfold according to Merton's chronological monastic life traced through the decades beginning with his entry into monastic life in 1941 and ending with his death in 1968.

In the opening chapter, entitled, 'The Making of a Monk', Cunningham posits three reasons why Merton became a monk and remained a monk the rest of his life. The first reason is that 'Merton very much desired a life spent as far away from and in contrast to the life he had lived before entering the monastery' (p. 26). Second, 'Merton desired to live a life of penance for his own sins and as a necessary condition for a fuller life of contemplative prayer' (p. 27). Third and most important was 'The contemplative life as a life spent for God' (p. 27). As Merton grew and matured in monastic life his understanding of these reasons would deepen and the ways he would articulate them became more refined. Evidence of just how significant these reasons were for Merton can be traced throughout his extensive and varied literary legacy. In this book Cunningham does that tracing with both insight and sensitivity.

Rather than summarize the book's content, I would like to focus on several of the key insights that I feel render it unique among the biographies of Thomas Merton. First of all, Merton was not just a writer in residence at the Abbey of Gethsemani. He was a monk and he lived the full monastic life. This is a life organized around the Divine Office plus a significant amount of assigned work. It is a life lived under an abbot and a rule wherein obedience becomes the central dynamic around which all other aspects of the life revolve. That is hard for people who are not monastics to understand. Merton did not have a lot of time to dedicate to his writing. Cunningham estimates that three hours per day would have been a lot. Add to this the fact that the Trappist form of monastic life, during Merton's time, was very isolated, work oriented, and very suspicious of the intellectual life. He had very limited and irregular access to newspapers, magazines, journals, radio or the telephone. His theological education took place at the Abbey and what there was of it was geared toward the essentials needed for ordination to the priesthood. And even though he was allowed to continue writing as a monk, early on much of the subject matter of his writing was mandated by his superiors. Some of these restrictions eased up during the later part of Merton's life but nevertheless the personal discipline required to produce books and articles in the midst of living fully the Trappist monastic life is almost unimaginable. This also explains the vital role that letter writing assumed in his life. It was his primary connection to the larger world outside the monastery.

One does not reach the pinnacle of monastic life simply by entering a monastery or even by making final monastic profession. One's growth as a monk never ends. Cunningham is very much aware of this reality and thus he is able to show just how much Merton's writing is influenced by his own continual growth as a monk and his struggles to grasp the deeper meanings of monastic life: how it should be lived and where it should be lived. Throughout most of this book Cunningham works back and forth between where Merton is with his personal and communal monastic life and what he is writing. In effect the author shows that one cannot really be understood without the other. As Merton grew in his self-understanding and his self confidence as a monk his writings also matured. His perspective broadens beyond the walls of Gethsemani and his sense of connectedness to the

broader church and to humankind also expands. It is precisely as a monk living on the margins of society that Merton is able to observe and comment on what is happening in the church and the world during the turbulent 1960s. Many activists, such as Rosemary Radford Reuther and even Joan Baez, criticized Merton as wasting his life hiding away in a monastery when his voice and presence were needed in the midst of the world and its turmoil. As a monk, however, Merton knew that this was not true. His only worthwhile perspective and his only valid observations were precisely from where he was and who he was, a Trappist monk living at the Abbey of Gethsemani.

Being a monk and being a saint are not necessarily coextensive. Cunningham makes this very clear in the case of Merton. When a person is a monk in a monastery that person is basically just one of the folks. Life is lived very close in the cloister and there is little room for celebrities. This is how much of Merton's life was lived, being one of the folks. The monks knew he published but he was not a local celebrity. He had the humanness that all monks have and neither profession nor ordination changed his basic personality. He had strong likes and dislikes, he misjudged persons and events, and he felt that constant controlling arm of his abbot. Nevertheless, he was not an internal rebel nor did he encourage others to be. He was an obedient monk throughout his entire monastic life. Cunningham is particularly insightful in treating the relationship Merton had with a young nurse in 1966. He had just begun living full time as a hermit and in a sense he was experiencing monastic life as he had dreamed it should be. Then a combination of love and infatuation hit him and quickly turned his world upside down. Neither his choices nor his actions were exemplary at that time. Much of his consternation and confusion are expressed in his private journal (*Learning to Love: Journals*, VI) and through poetry (*Eighteen Poems*). Ultimately his monastic life carried him through this and he regained his balance. In commenting on the written record of all this which Merton left behind Cunningham says, 'It may well be that he left a record of that experience precisely to fill out his portrait as a deeply human and flawed person' (p. 141).

Merton's monastic growth led him in a wide variety of directions. Because he could read Latin he discovered the rich treasures of his own Cistercian tradition, which he was able to digest and bring into the popular forum. He ventured into Eastern religion where he found insights which furthered his own monastic self-understanding. He saw the richness in the thinking and writing coming out of Latin America long before the phrase 'liberation theology' was ever created. In so many ways Merton's monastic journey was echoed in his writings which had a prophetic edge. Books, letters, essays, poetry, journals all somehow flowed from that central core of his monastic existence.

In summing up Merton's life Cunningham makes the following very astute observation:

My conviction is that because Merton not only believed but existentially struggled with experiencing and articulating the foundations of belief and the conversion of consciousness in a life set apart from the world, he was able to express some powerfully authentic words that could speak to others in the world who also sought some sense of the transcendent in their own lives as a source of sustenance for authentic living (p. 107).

There is little doubt in my mind that Lawrence Cunningham has captured the 'monastic vision' of Thomas Merton. That of course is the only real vision Merton ever sought. This book is as close to an insider's view of Thomas Merton as I have read. While it covers material familiar to all devotees of Merton, the perspective is unique. It is precisely because of this unique perspective that I highly recommend the book to all who are seeking a deeper insight into Thomas Merton the monk.

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BAKER, Rob and Gray Henry (eds.), *Merton and Sufism: The Untold Story. A Complete Compendium* (Louisville: Fons Vitae, 1999), pp. 340. ISBN 1-887752-07-2 (paperback). \$25.95.

Thomas Merton is recognized in the field of religious studies for his immense contributions to Buddhist-Christian dialogue, particularly on the subject of the meaning of awareness in the Zen tradition. For the first time since his death, there is an important book that contains Merton's lectures, poems, notes, correspondences, and book reviews, all of which reveal his serious interests in Islam, and especially in the Sûfî tradition. In this invaluable compendium of Merton's works on Islam one can easily read the multifaceted and wide range of interests in Sûfism, especially his discovery of Sûfî spiritual love for the divine.

Merton and Sufism confirms again that Merton was a man consumed by the love for God and the love of seeking a deeper knowledge of God. The book begins with a preface and an introduction by two distinguished Sûfî scholars of our time, Seyyed Hossein Nasr and William C. Chittick. Nasr's preface speaks about Merton's attraction to Sûfism and how his knowledge of the Islamic mystical path was authentic and genuine and 'thirsted for the kind of structured mystical life which the Sûfî path offered' (p. 11). The chapter by Chittick is a useful short introduction for readers who are unfamiliar with the roots of Sûfism and its place within the Islamic tradition. It appears that Chittick was interested in outlining the main concepts of how Sûfis view the unveiling process (*kashf*) of themselves to reach a stage of annihilation and subsistence to reunite with God. Here Chittick demonstrates the dichotomy between the dogmatic and philosophical Islamic scholars versus Sûfis and the ways in which classical Sûfis interpreted numerous passages of the Qur'ân and the Prophet Muhammad's sayings (*hadiths*) to support their mystical path. In one way, Chittick's description of the early Sûfis parallels Merton's own encounter with Sufism.

The first three chapters are reflections of Merton's interests in Sûfism, Islam, and his dialogue on Islam with an Islamicist, Louis Massignon. Burton Thurston discussed Merton's thought, which stemmed from his monastic life, on the essentialness of trials. Thurston described how for Merton, 'You can't live for God without trial...love and trials are inseparable' (p. 35) reflects many Sûfî themes of restraining and disciplining the soul (*nafs*) against basic human instincts. Clearly, there are overwhelming Sûfî spiritual themes in Merton's struggle to develop a 'real' piety before the Lord, which for him required one to resist the appetites of the soul. While the practice of resisting is not specifically spelled out in these chapters, one can assume that Merton's knowledge of the classical Sûfî shaiyks like al-Hallâj, al-Hujwiri, al-Junâyd, Farîd ud-dîn 'Attâr introduced him to what it entailed. In