

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.

Eugene Hensell, OSB

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 shaikhs like al-Hallâj, al-Hujwîrî, al-Junâyid, Farîd ud-dîn 'Attâr introduced him to what it entailed. In

Bonnie Thurston's chapter entitled 'Thomas Merton's Interest in Islam: The Example of Dhikr' she illustrates how his practice of remembrance of God was central to his spirituality. While at times the chapter contains simplistic conclusions of Sûfi theology and practices, or even of Merton's understanding of the tradition, one can not ignore Merton's deep desire to develop a spiritual core and a transcendental Sûfi spirituality.

With regard to Merton's correspondences with Louis Massignon, which amount to about 14 letters from 1959 to 1961, both individuals connect together and write about their common spiritual paths as well as their concerns on modernity, war, and the evils in society. From this chapter one is astonished by Massignon's influence on Merton's thought and increasing understanding of Islam. Sidney Griffith's chapter on the Massignon-Merton relationship is essential to understanding Merton's widening network of mutual friends, especially to those folks who practiced the Sûfi way or were interested in similar questions of Sûfi spirituality. In a convincing essay, Griffith shows how the Islamic faith poses several challenges in terms of knowing the 'other' In particular, encountering Islam's focus on the God of Abraham forced these two figures to rethink the purity of the heart as Christians. Merton's love for Massignon is reflected in his book *Life and Holiness*, which he dedicated to Louis Massignon, but I think it was Massignon's passion for being committed to a martyred Sûfi Shaikh's life—al-Hallâj—that really opened Merton's heart even further to the meaning of Sûfi love.

Without a doubt the heart of the book lies in Chapter 7, 'Merton's Sûfi Lectures to Cistercian Novices, 1966-68', written by Bernadette Dieker. Dieker has transcribed Merton's knowledge of Islam and Sûfi lectures to his fellow monks at Gethsemani. Dieker accurately points out his profound wisdom of the tradition, which cannot be separated from his love of injecting humor into the lectures. Merton's subjects to discuss with the Cistercian monks are precisely chosen so that his fellow monks can see the continuity and comparative themes in both traditions. Whether he is speaking on the subject of 'knowledge of God' or 'God Manifest' or 'Searching for God', this chapter vividly demonstrates Merton's spiritual illumination by Sûfi teachings. In his discussion on 'The Names of God' he stated that 'He makes Himself known to us, is to receive into Oneself the breathing of God's Mercy' (p. 140). Merton is hitting upon one of the most important Sûfi teachings, which is that God's self-disclosure in this world is a tangible and obtainable goal. Later in the seventh chapter, Merton's discussion 'The Straight Way' directly refers to the first chapter (*surâ*) of the Qur'ân, the *fatihah*. His exegesis of the *fatihah* mirrors that of many other Sûfi scholars of the present and past, especially his concentration on the section of God's mercy, where he states 'God as Merciful or *rah-mân*, is the basic mercy in which everything is grounded; God Himself as the ground of all being is Mercy itself' (p. 141). I think any reader will realize by this point Merton's authentic Sûfi faith and genuine love for the direct experience that comes with divine harmony. In this section one is convinced that Merton had a unique ability to internalize some basic ideas of Sûfi spirituality, while at the same time being able to speak about it in real terms. Even without the guidance of a Sûfi shaikh or teacher, which is the usual method of learning and practicing the inner path, Merton's lectures displays a type of love that is manifested from humility, sincere piety, dissolution of the self, all of which are directly from the Sûfi tradition.

It is clear that Merton tried to read everything available on Sûfism, and one par-

ticular work that stood out was Martin Ling's book *A Moslem Saint of the Twentieth Century*. This focused on the sayings and teachings of the Algerian Sûfi teacher Shaikh Ahmad al-'Alawî (1869–1939), who for Merton was a remarkable man of God. As a spiritual seeker, Merton made markings, underlined passages, and added marginal commentaries in his own copy. At one section he wrote down: 'Where soe'er ye turn, there is the Face of God', which is actually a verse from the Qur'ân. If there was a moment in Merton's life that must have opened his eyes, ears, and heart to Sûfi practice it must have been his encounter with the Moroccan Sûfi teacher Sidi Abdeslam. Sidi Abdeslam visited the Abbey of Gethsemani in October of 1966 and in Rob Baker's essay one vividly feels Merton's absolute awe at his presence. With this visit Merton finally reached a Sûfi unveiling, or at least a closer insight into the divine. He wrote in his journal the following:

'Above all, importance of knowing and following the voice of one's own heart, one's own secret: God in us. Deepening contact with source. Through a friend etc. who understands. Certainly this visit had that effect. A deepening, a clearing of the wells (p. 245).

This book is an incredible contribution to the life and works of Merton, and a groundbreaking source both for those who think they know Merton and also for those who rejected his understanding of Islam's contemplative Sûfi tradition. Without any doubt this book responds to the skeptics and experts on Merton by encapsulating his extensive knowledge of the Sûfi tradition. One of the many advantages of this book is that the reader can read Merton's poems and book reviews that are related to Islam and to the Sûfi tradition in the appendix section. Again, the reader will be amazed to find how Merton embodied the love and humility of the Sûfis with little Sûfi guidance, and also the way in which his poems echo the same inner desire for God as those of Imâm Jalâl ud-dîn Rumî of Ibn 'Arabî. In Merton's poem entitled 'To Belong to Allah', truly captures his spiritual core and inner path of enlightenment:

To belong to Allah
 Is to see in your own existence
 And in all that pertains to it
 Something that is neither yours
 Nor from yourself,
 Something you have on loan;
 To see your being in His Being,
 Your subsistence in His Subsistence,
 Your strength in His Strength:
 Thus you will recognize in yourself
 His title to possession of you
 As Lord,
 And your own title as servant:
 Which is Nothingness (pp. 290-91).