

(99); but there is virtually nothing in the rest of the book to support or develop this thought.

Of particular note is the way that the issue of solitude repeatedly appears. Merton wants “an even more solitary life than we have here in the monastery” (4). What grows on him most (this was written in 1947) “is the desire for solitude—to vanish completely ... and never be heard of again” (33). He would like to go “into solitude for good” (35). “Without solitude of some sort there is and can be no maturity” (72), he says—not surprisingly as a worshipper of a “Solitary God” (72)—no reference here to the community of Persons in the Trinity. Again I freely acknowledge that solitude is a major theme in Merton’s spirituality; but there is something lopsided about how prominent a place it holds in the book. It does not hold up for us the paradoxical character of Thomas Merton who at the same time hungered for solitude and corresponded with hundreds in his return from solitude, indeed who saw his actions in the larger world to proceed from his experience of solitude.

Admittedly, Merton was a monk *sui generis*, monastic “in his own way,” to use a phrase which has been applied to Leonard Cohen—like Merton a poet, a dissenting voice, and a cultural icon. But he combined his wide-ranging thoughts, readings, writings and relationships, zaniness/Zenniness and mischievousness with a solid commitment to his identity as Christian, monk and priest. I am unable to believe, in fact, that the Merton of “Day of a Stranger” would have wanted to hang out, so to speak, with the Merton of the limited dimensions which this book offers to its readers. I would recommend to its readers that they read it in company with either Lawrence S. Cunningham’s *Thomas Merton, Spiritual Master* or by Christine Bochen’s *Thomas Merton: Essential Writings*, either of which offers continuity between the essentially early Merton and the later, socially engaged and transcultural figure which he became.

Donald Grayston

MERTON, Thomas, *Lent and Easter Wisdom*. Compiled by Jonathan Montaldo for The Merton Institute for Contemplative Living. (Liguori, MO: Liguori Publications, 2006), pp. xii + 115 pages. \$9.95 (paperback).

Each year, on Ash Wednesday, millions of Christians, begin the Lenten journey, hearing Jesus’ instruction from the Gospel ac-

ording to Matthew, "But when you pray, go to your inner room, close the door, and pray to your Father in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will repay you." Where do they go to find that "inner room?" Pastors, spiritual directors, catechists, adult-faith formation directors, music ministers, and liturgists seek means to open passageways through the clutter of multitasking lives for the persons they serve. Jonathan Montaldo, Associate Director of the Merton Institute for Contemplative Living, has compiled daily reflections for the journey to conversion through Lent, Triduum, and the First Week of Easter. Each day, access to the inner room of the reader's heart, is opened by a passage from the Scriptures, an excerpt from Thomas Merton's collection of essays, *Seasons of Celebration*, a prayer, and a question to prompt journaling by the reader.

The forty-days preparation for Easter, since its origin in the late fourth century, has always imitated Jesus' sojourn in the wilderness. Through a great variety of dietary and devotional practices, it has reflected the three pillars of Judaeo-Christian tradition: fasting, prayer, and almsgiving. Christian life, rooted in the Paschal Mystery, is always a journey of conversion through these three channels. The restoration of the catechumenate through the Rite of Christian Initiation has provided in most Catholic parishes a visible reminder to the baptized members, that life in Christ is, as stated by Montaldo, "a movement from one state of being to another."

Cistercian monk, Thomas Merton, has charted his movement from one state of being to another through thousands of pages of journaling. Those familiar with his extraordinary gift of naming the utterances of his own soul in language that spoke kinship to the souls of millions of readers, will find in this compilation, nuggets that will bring fresh sight to each day of the journey. Drawn from fifteen essays written by Merton from 1950-1964, later published in *Seasons of Celebration*, each day's entry is adjoined to a related passage from the lectionary readings for the day, a prayer, and a question or consideration that invites journaling.

Journaling provides a framework for the "inner room," because it is a place of conversation between the person journaling and God alone. Thomas Merton, through his many pages of journaling has provided a model that neither intimidates those of us less articulate, nor substitutes for our own words, but leads us to an increasing freedom to speak our truth with God. It is apparent throughout Merton's journals, that the inner dialogue is prayer and not diary.

These are never conversations with himself. The critique often directed against contemplative practice, including journaling, is that it is navel-gazing. Merton's most interior experiences of God deepened his consciousness of his relationship with the entire human family and his relationship with all creation.

Montaldo's use of the lectionary as the guide for the journey unites the focus for the reflections and prayers of the individual with that of the whole Church. Before the liturgical reform of the Second Vatican Council, Lenten piety was, most often, individualistic and not anchored in the communal and ecclesial founts of Scripture and liturgy. *Lent and Easter Wisdom from Thomas Merton* effectively helps those raised in the piety of the pre-Vatican II Catholic Church grow into a more ecclesial paschal consciousness. The Church fathers decreed in the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, "the spiritual life, however, is not limited solely to participation in the liturgy. The Christian is indeed called to pray with his brethren, but he must also enter into his chamber to pray to the Father in secret; yet more, according to the teaching of the Apostle, he should 'pray without ceasing'." (1Thessalonians 5:17) These devotions should be so drawn up that they harmonize with the liturgical seasons." (Paragraph 12). For those whose prayer life is only in community, this book may serve as a guide to a deeper interior life. For those in the catechumenate, this book is a valuable companion during those final steps toward the dying and birthing of Baptism, Confirmation, and Eucharist.

The daily reflections for the first week of Lent call us into the desert with insights about asceticism and fasting. Merton instructs the reader "all Christian asceticism is characterized by wholeness and balance." The practices of fast and abstinence from food that are part of the Church's Lenten regimen, as well as those personally chosen "giving up for Lent" disciplines, must be rooted in the dying and rising of the Paschal Mystery. Through the second week, Merton directs the reader to look within. He comments on the wrestling with illusions that keep persons from true freedom. It is in the communal celebration of the mystery of Christ that "the Christian discovers the secret of his own inviolable solitude." Maturing through this season of redeemed time is the process toward union with Christ, as Merton describes: "Time does not limit freedom, but gives it scope for its exercise and choice." Since conversion is the goal of the Lenten journey, forgiveness and reconciliation are the seed and the fruit of the season. Merton's trust in God's

mercy inspires the freedom to forgive. During that holiest season of the year, the Triduum, Merton focuses on two central words of the Scriptures: "*Hesed*"—the "loving kindness" constant in the covenant of the Hebrew Scriptures and "*metanoia*"—the "change of heart" response to the Gospel by the faithful disciple. These are the source and consequence of the dying and rising of Jesus Christ celebrated in Easter. "This gift, this mercy, this unbounded love for God for us has been lavished upon us as a result of Christ's victory." The Second Sunday of Easter, concludes this journey with Scripture and Merton. The light of Christ that flickered in darkened churches to announce the Resurrection is experienced in the inner room of the reader.

In reading one's own daily journaling of this season of prayer, the Christian can recognize his or her maturing into union with Christ and can say with St. Paul, "I regard everything as loss because of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord." This compilation of readings and reflections provides the reader with small seeds of contemplation that will grow into a greater knowledge of the Risen Lord.

Fr. Ron Atwood

WALDRON, Robert, *Thomas Merton: Master of Attention* (London: Darton, Longman, & Todd, Ltd, 2007), pp. 101 ISBN 0-232-52714-8 (paperback). \$16.95.

Those with an artistic temperament will love this book. Those who want to explore time-tested or new insights into contemplation as an act of *attention* will also love this book. Basing his work on Thomas Merton's experience with and love for art, Robert Waldron has created a gem of a treatise on prayer—from the original poem, "Attention," to the final chapter on love. The reader will be captivated by Waldron's graceful prose, his ability to insert biographical data at just the right moment, and his fresh insights into Merton's transformative experiences. As long-time English teacher, reader of psychology and of Merton, Waldron is aptly equipped to delve into Merton's life and writing. His opening chapter, devoted to a biography of Merton, is both full and lean: full enough for the neophyte and lean enough for the seasoned Merton reader.

In "The Connoisseur of Beauty," Waldron traces Merton's fascination with art during his pre-monastic days. With skill, he juxtaposes the "pictures of little irate Byzantine-looking saints"