Fortunately, the rewards of immersing oneself in the reading far outweigh such considerations. Available here is a remarkable opportunity for an exploration of Bernard's world, and of Merton's. If, as James Finley notes in his Preface, "The playful humor that was present when Merton spoke tends not to be evident in these notes" (vii), *The Cistercian Fathers and Their Monastic Theology* is nonetheless a vibrant piece of writing. The conferences readily engage the reader with a discussion that, ultimately, beckons one to pray.

John E. Allard, OP

MERTON, Thomas, *Thomas Merton on Monastic Spirituality* (Introduction by Fr. Anthony Ciorra + 6 talks: 6 CDs); *Thomas Merton on Pilgrimage to the Holy Land* (Introduction by Fr. Anthony Ciorra + 3 talks: 3 CDs); *Thomas Merton on Desert Spirituality* (Introduction by Fr. Anthony Ciorra + 8 talks: 5 CDs) (Rockville, MD: Now You Know Media, 2016).

After a year's hiatus during which no new material was released (evidently due to personnel changes at the company), in 2016 Now You Know Media added three more sets of audio recordings of Thomas Merton's novitiate conferences to its extensive catalogue of Merton materials; each is introduced by Fr. Anthony Ciorra, who was the most frequent contributor of these commentaries for the earlier programs issued in 2012-14 as well. Though it is nowhere indicated by Fr. Ciorra or in the brief descriptions printed on the cases of the sets, all these presentations belong to the lengthy course (66 classes *in toto*) on Pre-Benedictine Monasticism[1] that Merton began in early 1963 and that continued to run on Sunday afternoons until the week Merton resigned as master of novices and became a full-time hermit in August 1965.

The first set, *Thomas Merton on Monastic Spirituality*, is composed of the initial half-dozen sessions of this course, each close to an hour in length (though generally shortened somewhat by omission of preliminary material in these published versions), presented between February 3 and March 24, 1963, and focused on significant monastic texts and figures of the fourth and fifth centuries that preceded and in some cases directly influenced the *Rule* of St. Benedict. As usual, Fr. Ciorra's introductory comments are aimed mainly at listeners with relatively little previous acquaintance with Merton, providing a helpful general overview of Merton's

1. Thomas Merton, *Pre-Benedictine Monasticism: Initiation into the Monastic Tradition* 2, ed. Patrick F. O'Connell (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 2006): see in particular the discussion in the Introduction comparing the written text and oral presentation of this material (li-lxi) and Appendix B, the table of correspondences between the text and the recorded conferences (359-62).

life and work for this audience along with a less detailed consideration of the specific content of the particular conferences in the set. Once again he describes Merton's monastic life as falling into three main periods (as first outlined in his 2014 introduction to Merton's conferences on *St. Thomas Aquinas and "The Ways of God"* and to be used as well in the other two conference sets appearing in 2016). The "monastic" period (1941-51) finds Merton immersing himself in the Cistercian way of life and discovering a kind of familial acceptance and stability largely missing in his restless pre-conversion life; the "church" period (1951-60) sees Merton broadening his perspectives and deepening his understanding as he situates his monastic life in the context of the work of the church as a whole and comes to identify with people beyond the cloister, most vividly in the famous Fourth and Walnut experience of March 18, 1958; the final "world" period is marked by Merton's complete openness to the presence of God beyond the walls of the monastery and the boundaries of the institutional church, his engagement with crucial social issues of the time and his dialogue with other religious traditions. This charting of expanding horizons provides a useful context for approaching Merton's religious life and work (though the chronology is a bit haphazard in spots, as *New Seeds of Contemplation* [1961], *No Man Is an Island* [1955] and *Thoughts in Solitude* [1958] are mentioned as belonging to the first period, and reference is made to recordings of talks to the scholastics in connection with the second period, although taping of Merton's conferences began only in late April 1962, two-thirds of the way through his decade-long term as master of novices). Fr. Ciorra sees Merton's attraction to solitude as a constant that runs throughout his entire monastic life, and as evident in the talks included in this set. He notes that Merton never regards the Benedictine *Rule* in a static fashion, but as a way to grow in the love of Christ as found in the monastic community, in the poor and in oneself. Fr. Ciorra maintains that Benedict and his predecessors who are discussed in these conferences speak to the hunger for simplicity that so many feel in today's complicated world and concludes by encouraging his audience to heed the words of the opening lines of the *Rule* to listen "with the ear of your heart" to Merton's insights on these early models of monastic life.

In the opening conference, after emphasizing the need for prayer as the proper context for understanding and appreciating the material to be discussed, Merton stresses the importance of seeing the Benedictine *Rule* not in isolation but as a culmination and digest of much of the preceding development of western monasticism, warning against the inevitable distortions that result from too narrow a perspective. Following a brief summary of important (largely French) monastic foundations and develop-

ments preceding Benedict, he turns to the figure of St. Paulinus of Nola as a characteristic and particularly attractive pre-monastic figure of the fourth century, an aristocratic ascetic, poet and correspondent with most of the important Christian figures of his era, living in married chastity with his wife and providing hospitality and counsel at the shrine of the martyr St. Felix at Nola in southern Italy. He points out the importance of encountering such figures as actual persons rather than as highly idealized but unrealistic models of perfection. The following conference focuses on two subjects of very influential biographies that do in fact tend to idealize them and so must be read sympathetically but critically. St. Martin of Tours is the first great monastic figure of western Europe, best known for the story of his sharing his cloak with a beggar revealed in a dream to be Christ himself, during the period when Martin was still a soldier and a catechumen; the incident is told by Sulpicius Severus (a friend and correspondent of Paulinus) in his biography of Martin, filled, Merton says, with "tall tales," but also providing information on Martin's foundation of both clerical (canonical) and more strictly monastic religious life, his resistance to coercive governmental intrusion in matters of religious belief (influenced by his mentor St. Hilary of Poitiers), and the opposition to monasticism from the largely aristocratic Gallo-Roman bishops, deeply invested in the imperial system of the early Christian empire and therefore unsympathetic to the values of ascetic simplicity espoused by Martin – a reminder that what sometimes seems to be a golden age of miraculous divine interventions was often actually filled with tensions and conflicts within the church itself. The second great figure Merton discusses here is St. Anthony, the outstanding exemplar of early Egyptian desert spirituality, whose life as written by St. Athanasius presents him both as a champion of Christian orthodoxy and as a figure of heroic sanctity surpassing the deeds of pagan heroes, someone who would have tremendous influence on the lives of Christians in the east as well as the west, notably including St. Augustine, as related in his *Confessions*. The third and fourth conferences move on to consider the two main streams of Egyptian monasticism, the eremitic tradition associated with Anthony and the cenobitic system instituted by Pachomius. The sayings of the desert fathers are presented as the great treasury of eremitic wisdom, supplemented by somewhat later, more organized accounts such as the *Historia Monachorum* of Rufinus (actually the translator and amplifier of this anonymous monastic "travelogue," though Merton does not specify this distinction in his oral presentation of this material). After considering in some detail various sayings associated with St. Anthony in the first half of his fourth conference, Merton spends the rest of the conference

considering the prologue of the *Historia*, with its archetypal presentation of the monk as both an angelic and a prophetic figure. This commentary on the prologue continues into the fifth class, which considers the monk's salvific role in the world as centered in his vocation to be fully real, living out the call to incarnate the divine image through being a peacemaker (not always successfully, as Merton notes in a digression on the tendency toward "monastic pugnacity" visible throughout the centuries), a meek, gentle "soldier of Christ" armed only with prayer. He then considers the conference on the solitary life given to the monastic travelers by the famed hermit John of Lycopolis in the opening chapter of the *Historia*, which he compares to the first of John Cassian's *Conferences*, written during the same period. Both works stress purity of heart, as Merton notes in finishing his discussion of this chapter in the sixth conference, after which he turns briefly to the presentation of cenobitic life in subsequent chapters of the *Historia*, along with the story of the monk Paphnutius who learns that his own holiness is matched by figures living in the world, and a brief mention of the hermit colonies of Nitria, Scete and the Cells, associated with the motif of a return to the innocence of paradise that is a hallmark of Merton's own writing on the desert father tradition.

Thomas Merton on Pilgrimage to the Holy Land (a bit of a teaser as a title, which could be taken as referring to a trip Merton himself never made) includes three conferences on the voyage to the east of the Spanish nun Aetheria (or Egeria as she is now known), given almost exactly a year later (January 6 and 12 and February 2, 1964), at the conclusion of what Merton himself refers to here as the "first volume" of the pre-Benedictine course. (In the intervening conferences he had discussed at length the writings of John Cassian, Pachomius and Basil, and more briefly Sts. Melania and Jerome as representatives of Roman monasticism in Palestine.) In his introduction Fr. Ciorra suggests that the visit to Jerusalem of Pope Paul VI in January 1964 prompted Merton's discussion of Aetheria's account of her pilgrimage in the late fourth or early fifth century, but while Merton mentions the pope's journey it is clear that the timing is coincidental, as this material is presented in its proper sequence as part of the pre-Benedictine course as a whole. After a brief summary once again of the three periods of Merton's monastic life, Fr. Ciorra focuses on the importance of the motif of the pilgrimage or spiritual journey in Merton's writing and its paradoxical connection with monastic stability (since, as Merton writes, the real journey of life is interior). He notes Merton's delight with the artless writing of Aetheria, evident from his journal, her importance as an early witness to the liturgy as celebrated in Jerusalem, and the connection of these talks to Merton's

important essay "From Pilgrimage to Crusade," written later that year, in which Aetheria plays a significant part.

The opening segments of the first two of these conferences are discussions of the writings of two contemporary existentialists, the philosopher Karl Jaspers and the theologian Rudolf Bultmann, respectively, which have no intrinsic connection with the pre-Benedictine course generally or with Aetheria in particular, but simply summarize insights from Merton's current reading that he wants his audience to know about. The Sunday conference periods, about twice as long as the others, provide him with the best opportunity to acquaint them with some basic ideas of these important thinkers, particularly Jaspers' emphasis on an experience of God not as an object, a being among other beings accessible through logical propositions, but as the source of all existence, and Bultmann's dialectical arguments for the relationship between Christianity and humanism, in which an apparent opposition between faith in revelation and natural knowledge is eventually transcended (by seeking the kingdom first, all the rest will be added), and common cause is made to overcome contemporary nihilism. Eventually turning to Aetheria in the first of these conferences, Merton outlines the story of the discovery of her (somewhat mutilated) text in the late nineteenth century as well as the speculation it provoked as to her actual identity, and provides an overview of her three-year pilgrimage, not only to the holy land itself but to virtually all biblical sites in the eastern Mediterranean. His thorough enthusiasm for her lively personality and for the entertaining account, in highly colloquial Latin, of her journey is immediately evident. In the following class he situates her pilgrimage in the context of the Christian rebuilding of Jerusalem following the visit of St. Helena, mother of the Emperor Constantine, earlier in the fourth century, associated with the discovery of the true cross and construction of basilicas on the sites of crucifixion and resurrection. Aetheria's pattern of scriptural reading and public and personal prayer at all the holy sites she visits is seen by Merton as representing an early practice that will develop into various methods of meditation not dependent on actual physical presence at shrines or other sacred places. The final conference on Aetheria focuses specifically on her encounters with the monks whom she finds everywhere along her route, at Sinai, in Syria, in Asia Minor. Her eyewitness testimony to their hospitality and Merton's evident appreciation (and perhaps amusement) for her wide-eyed innocence and boundless energy provide a rather different angle of vision on monastic life than that found in other texts previously discussed. It is a very human picture, Merton notes, that at times seems to resemble Times Square at rush hour more than the solitude of the desert. He concludes

by contrasting her admiration for the wandering monks (*apotactites*) she meets with the evident hostility of St. Jerome for similar groups, which he denigrates for what he considers their lack of stability.

With these conferences Merton officially brings an end to the first series of the pre-Benedictine monasticism course (though he then adds as a kind of appendix four classes in February and March on a recent discovery, the writings of St. Anthony's successor Abbot Ammonas). When in mid-June he begins the second part of the course (still on Sundays but now reduced to the same half-hour time period as the conferences given on other days), he turns his attention to monasticism in Syria, most of which is "pre-Benedictine" only chronologically, not in terms of any direct or indirect influence. *Thomas Merton on Desert Spirituality* comprises the first eight presentations of this second series, from June 21 through August 23, 1964; the generic title is a bit misleading, as many of the figures profiled were "*boskoi*," solitaries living in forests and mountains rather than in literal deserts. Fr. Ciorra's introduction explores the image of the desert in Merton's spirituality in general, looking at his introduction to *Wisdom of the Desert* and highlighting his early statement in *The Sign of Jonas*, after being named master of scholastics, that the name of his new desert is compassion. After briefly noting that these conferences focus on Syrian monasticism, with particular mention of the figure of Julian Sabas, a hermit who attracts disciples and so begins a community, and of some of the more extreme ascetic practices that characterize this tradition, he quickly summarizes his three phases of Merton's monastic life once again and lists the titles of the eight conferences to follow. As he had in the two previous introductions, he concludes, presumably at the company's behest, with an encouragement to obtain other Now You Know Merton programs, implying that Merton's "spoken word legacy" is now being made available for the first time, overlooking the fact that recordings had previously been issued commercially since the 1970s, first by Electronic Paperbacks and then by Credence Communications, and ignoring the truly unique contribution of Now You Know in providing most of these sets in coherent groupings reflecting the progression of Merton's own courses.

Merton begins this second part of his pre-Benedictine course with an overview of early monastic developments in the east, presenting the origin of Syrian monastic life as basically independent of Greek and Egyptian Coptic influence and as marked by the extreme asceticism characteristic of Syriac Christianity generally. In the following conference he begins to look at the *Historia Religiosa* of Bishop Theodoret of Cyrrhus as a principal source of information on the major Syrian ascetics, many of

whom he knew personally, but one that looks at them largely through a Greek lens, using imagery from athletics and from music (harmony being a principal goal of Syrian religious life). He continues to rely on Theodoret through the next four conferences, looking successively at James of Nisibis, supposedly a *boskos* who eventually became a bishop, and whose life is presented as reproducing the virtues of Old Testament saints; at Julian Sabas, who becomes an influential monastic *abba* ("*sabas*" being the Syriac equivalent) in the transition from eremitic to cenobitic life; and various other figures, some of them marked by rather bizarre ascetic practices. Merton calls attention to the literary genre of Theodoret's work – panegyric rather than strict biography; to the variety of monastic practices depicted, a "paradisiac anarchy" rather than any strict uniformity in submission to a common rule; to the pagan roots of much of the scorn for cleanliness and propriety among some of the solitaries in this tradition; but also to Theodoret's assertion that the perfection of Syrian monks is found in symmetry, in keeping the passions in balance, at its best a life of gentleness, tolerance, openness and non-violence that is not threatened by external circumstances and that is more relationally oriented than the comparable Greek idea of *apatheia*. The two final conferences consider the work of the first great writer in the Syriac ascetic tradition, Aphraat, a Persian whose deeply scriptural series of "Demonstrations," written for the pre-monastic ascetics known as "sons of the covenant," is completely independent of Greek influence. There is a strong emphasis on humility, which incorporates not only gentleness and meekness but also joy, even laughter – the willingness not to take oneself too seriously, a recognition that God's love is the deepest reality so that ultimately nothing else really matters. He notes Aphraat's teaching on different types of prayer for different states of mind, and provides a detailed reading and commentary on Aphraat's sixth *Demonstratio*, with its rhythmic, carefully balanced listing of key ascetic practices. (The discussion of Aphraat actually concludes with a ninth conference that is largely taken up with his warnings against the common Syriac practice of male and female ascetics living together in communal celibacy, including some rather harsh statements on women as temptresses – as well as exhortations to be spouses of Christ alone – which probably accounts for its being omitted from this set!) The subsequent segments of this second series of pre-Benedictine conferences will continue to focus on major Syrian figures, principally the great theologian and liturgical poet St. Ephrem and the monk and Monophysite bishop Philoxonos (actually a contemporary of St. Benedict), a figure already known to Merton readers through his significant presence in the great essay "Rain and the Rhinoceros," whose importance lies in his merging

of the Syrian tradition of Aphraat and Ephrem with the Greek thought of Origen and Evagrius.

Thus these three sets of recordings, though not explicitly recognized or identified as such, provide a significant sampling of Merton's most extensive course in monastic history, much of it discussing sources not available at the time in English – evidence both of his own deep interest in the roots of monastic spirituality and of his commitment to share the fruits of his own research with the young men whose spiritual formation had been entrusted to him. While some of this material might seem somewhat esoteric for a general audience, Merton's informal, often humorous yet deeply informed approach, always intent on making connections with contemporary issues within and beyond the monastery, brings even the most obscure movements and figures to life. It may be hoped that future Now You Know sets will make available further segments from this vast survey of the early phases of Christian religious life.

Patrick F. O'Connell

FOREST, Jim, *The Root of War Is Fear: Thomas Merton's Advice to Peacemakers* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2016), pp. xiii + 223. ISBN 978-1-62698-197-3 (paper) $25.

Jim Forest's *The Root of War Is Fear: Thomas Merton's Advice to Peacemakers* is a masterful synthesis of Merton's writings on war, peace and conscience. It is also a call to each reader to seek and pursue peace. Forest, the recipient of Merton's "Letter to a Young Activist" and a co-founder of the Catholic Peace Fellowship, regards the monk as a "pastor to peacemakers."[1] He considers his own vocation to pray, witness and work for peace as being significantly shaped by Merton's guidance. Forest argues that Merton offered a timely voice for peace in the 1950s and 1960s and that his witness to Christian peacemaking remains relevant today. Each chapter features substantial quotations from Merton's books, journals, essays, poetry and correspondence. Forest's reflections and commentary on Merton's insights are woven throughout the text. The result is a dialogue between a master and his apprentice that urges the reader to ask, "how can I, drawing on Merton's advice, become a better peacemaker in today's world?" (xi).

Forest's response to this question is to tell a story of Christian peacemaking during the Cold War period, a time that Forest regards as

1. See Staff of the Catholic Peace Fellowship, "The Duty is Evident: Merton, the CPF, and the Apostolic Work of Peacemaking," in *The Sign of Peace* 8.1 (2009) 11; accessible at: http://www.catholicpeacefellowship.org/downloads/WINTER_2009.pdf.