

Last evening, when the moon was rising, I saw the warm burning soft red of a doe in the field . . . and then I saw a second doe . . . . The thing that struck me most — when you look at them directly and in movement, you see what the primitive cave painters saw. Something you never see in a photograph. It is most awe-inspiring . . . . The deer reveals to me something essential, not only in itself, but also in myself . . . something profound. The face of that which is both in the deer and in myself . . . I could sense the softness of their brown coat and longed to touch them.

Here, at the end, Merton finds not only God but also himself, in an experience that did not need to be justified by Church or Abbot, by cognitive orthodoxy or credal rectitude. At the end, he is the hermit and monk, the contemplative and self-defined person he always longed to be.

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Robert Imperato

*MERTON AND WALSH ON THE PERSON*

Brookfield, Wisconsin: Liturgical Publications, 1988, © 1987  
vii, 174 pages -- \$14.95

Reviewed by **William H. Shannon**

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I don't quite know what to make of this book! From the book's cover and its bland unattractiveness, through the author's stern reprimand to Merton scholars for having uniformly ignored Daniel Walsh's influence on Merton's understanding of the "person" and on to his not always successful effort to hitch Merton's notion of "person" to Walsh's, I found myself bewildered by so many things.

One of them was the lack of clarity in the book. To take but one example: on page 4, in criticism of those who claimed that Merton got his notions of "person" and "individual" from Maritain, the author admits Merton's indebtedness to the French philosopher, but insists: "*Merton goes beyond* the philosophical distinctions of Maritain." I would certainly be prepared to say *amen* to that. Four pages later, the author, whose intent is to show Merton's indebtedness to Daniel Walsh for his understanding of "person" and "individual," states nonetheless: "*Merton moves beyond*

Walsh by taking care to avoid undue abstractness." It is not clear to me why the author believes that writers should be blamed for *speaking* of Maritain's influence on Merton, even though Merton went beyond Maritain, and at the same time be criticized for *not speaking* about Walsh's influence, whom Merton also "went beyond."

Something else that bothered me was the author's failure to tell us anything about Daniel Walsh beyond the few facts already known about him: items mentioned in *The Seven Storey Mountain* and other bits of information that circulate in "Merton circles." Imperato states that "around 1960" Walsh came to Kentucky. (It would be helpful to know exactly when he came. "Around 1960" is inexact and could mean before or after that date.) Imperato mentions that the Abbot gave Merton permission to meet with Walsh each week, but we are not told when that permission was given or how often the contacts took place. I came away from this book certainly with a clearer idea of Walsh's thinking on the meaning of "person," but without really coming to know the man behind those thoughts. While it is true the author's intent was to emphasize Walsh's teaching about "person," it would have been most welcome to readers to know a bit more about Walsh as a person. There is less than a page devoted to Walsh's life.

Yet another problem I had with this book was the random way in which the author put together what he considered Merton's thinking on the "person." On page 13 he admits the "unsystematic" approach to theology and anthropology that was characteristic of Merton. He then proceeds to systematize it. I have no difficulty with one person's effort to systematize Merton's thought, but I find it quite objectionable and unfair to Merton to have quotations from earlier and later periods of his life mingled indiscriminately: this defeats any real effort to bring Merton's thought into some kind of systematic arrangement, because it ignores the development and evolution of that thought. (In passing, I want to say that it is simply incorrect to say, as Imperato does on page 15, that Merton wrote *The Inner Experience* in the late 1950s. Merton does tell us that he spent part of the summer of 1959 in *revising* material that would come to be called *The Inner Experience*, but a good deal of the material in that work is much earlier, some of it from the late 1940s.)

Especially puzzling is the author's note attached to chapter III. This chapter carries the title "Personhood according to Walsh." The book surely reaches its climax in this chapter. For the author's intent is to present Walsh's understanding of "person," so that the reader may come to know

how that understanding influenced Thomas Merton. One would expect that this chapter would be the highlight of the book: the one above all the others that the author would most want us to read. How strange then to come upon the author's advice over the head of the chapter: "This chapter is difficult and technical. The general reader may wish to omit it." This is surely not a book for bedside reading. It is technical and difficult reading, not only in chapter III, but throughout. So who in the world is meant by "the general reader?" And isn't the author's advice something like saying: "I have prepared a wonderful meal for you, but you may want to omit the main course?"

I find it difficult to accept certain underlying assumptions that a reader is expected to take for granted in reading this book. Two fundamental assumptions are about Merton's relationship to Fr. Flavian Burns and to Daniel Walsh. Imperato asserts: "Father Flavian, Merton's last abbot and confessor, was closer to the mature Merton on the spiritual level than any other human being." And, further on, on the same page, he says that Walsh "was more intimate with Merton on the intellectual level than any other human being" (p. 90). No reviewer is going to ask questions about the first assertion. But certainly a reviewer has every right to challenge the author for some significant proof of the second assertion. This is especially true if known facts seem to be in conflict with the assertion. I would suggest, tentatively at least, that they are. On the author's own admission, Walsh spoke and wrote very much in the tradition and categories of scholastic theology. I believe that it can be demonstrated quite clearly (and I have attempted to do so in an article entitled "Thomas Merton and the Living Tradition of Faith," *Merton Annual* 1, 1988, pp. 79-101) that Merton was, by his own admission, uncomfortable writing in the categories of scholastic theology and very early abandoned those categories for a methodology that drew on experience and sought to come to grips with current questions. In other words, he moved toward a much more inductive approach to theology and spiritual experience and away from the deductive kind of thinking and writing that remained Walsh's stock in trade in doing theology. This demonstrable change in methodology on Merton's part must at the very least raise doubts about Imperato's thesis regarding the strong influence that Walsh exercised over Merton's thinking about the "person." Merton was a very eclectic reader with a very fertile, critical and creative mind. He was also an enthusiast, strongly influenced by what he might be reading or hearing at the moment. It seems to me that it must be said that

many factors, besides Maritain or Walsh, played their part in his growing understanding of what it meant to be a person and what he had to say about it. In the 1960s Merton's thinking was moving in directions very different from those of his revered teacher and great friend.

I do not want to belittle the importance for Merton scholarship of coming to know how and to what extent Merton was influenced by Daniel Walsh. This is what I would have hoped Imperato would do. I am surely grateful, as other Merton readers will be, for what he has told us, in chapter three especially, about Walsh's teaching on "person," "individual" and "community." Reading that chapter and grappling with Walsh's thoughts — for instance "the person originates in God's experience of Himself as imitable;" human personhood is "a share in the divine intimacy;" "Persons originate in the Logos as imitations or reflections of God's relation to Himself." — can be a powerfully exhilarating experience. And completing the chapter one can nod in understanding at the author's words:

For those privileged to hear Walsh expound his personalistic spirituality, there were often moments of excitement and illumination. At the same time, however, Walsh could cause confusion and perplexity. (p. 60)

Perhaps I could conclude this review by saying that experiences of the same sort are in store for those who read this book.

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M. Basil Pennington, O.C.S.O.

*A RETREAT WITH THOMAS MERTON*

Warwick, New York: Amity House, 1988  
114 pages -- \$8.95

Reviewed by **Donald St. John**

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M. Basil Pennington, O.C.S.O., has written a small book that does not fit easily into any traditional genre nor clearly establish a new one. The title itself is ambiguous and, unfortunately, that very ambiguity does reflect much of the book. The title would lead one to assume that this is a