

for Action and Contemplation. Thanks to the work of these men and their associates, the kind of prayer Thomas Merton wrote of so eloquently has now been made accessible even to the unlikeliest subjects. That, in turn, has created a much broader readership for Merton's books than, for example, the little convent of nuns to whom he passed the manuscript of *The Inner Experience* in 1968. Everywhere, the seeds of contemplation are finding fertile soil; everywhere, great trees of silent prayer are growing, giving rest to all kinds of different birds—even jailbirds like me!

What is contemplation? Perhaps it is not just an *inner* experience, but a shared experience by contemplatives across the world, across the ages. Perhaps contemplation will eventually become the blood that feeds the body of Christ everywhere—not inner but outer, not invisible but visible, not incorporeal but incarnate. Perhaps that would have been the next step on Merton's journey—the one that, sadly, he was not able to take.

Jens Söring

MERTON, Thomas, *Seeking Paradise: The Spirit of the Shakers*. Edited and introduced by Paul M. Pearson (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2003), pp. 125. ISBN 1-57075-501-9 (hardcover). \$24.00.

The opening words, "This book is a celebration of Merton's love of the Shakers," begin the preface by Paul M. Pearson (9). This work collects together in one volume several disparate pieces of Merton's thought: excerpts from his article on the Shaker Village at Pleasant Hill (1964); the introduction Merton wrote for Edward Deming Andrews's book *Religion in Wood: A Book of Shaker Furniture* (1964); "Work and the Shakers: A Transcript of a Conference Given by Thomas Merton at the Abbey of Gethsemani on July 22, 1964"; and "Selected Correspondence" from Merton to the Shaker scholar Edward Deming Andrews, Ralph McCallister – Executive Director of the Pleasant Hill project of restoration, and Mary Childs Black, convener for a discussion on the influence of religion on American folk art. In addition to these chapters, there is one entitled, "Pleasant Hill: A Shaker Village in Kentucky," which draws on material from Edward Deming Andrews's books, *Shaker Furniture* and *The People Called Shakers*.

One of the delights of the book is its many photographs of Shaker houses and furniture, most of which were taken by Merton himself. The clear simple lines of architecture and craftsmanship

in the furniture illustrate well Merton's deep appreciation for "the Edenic innocence which is the special glory and mystery of Shaker work" (79). Elsewhere, Merton had written in his Introduction to *Religion in Wood* the following:

One feels that for the Shaker craftsmen, love of God and love of truth in one's own work came to the same thing, and that work itself was a prayer, a communion with the inmost spiritual reality of things and so with God, not as if the "spirit" of the thing were something distinct from the thing itself, but in a full realization that everything that is, is in a certain sense "spirit," since "spirit," "form," and "actualization" are all one and the same. The Shakers thus had a deeply existential approach to reality (81).

Merton's words to the novices of his community, on a Shaker maxim, ring true today with respect to attitudes toward work, which allow the monk to be in communion with God while one works.

One of the Shakers' chief maxims was 'Put your hands to work and your hearts to God.' Well, of course, this is normal for us. You work and your heart is lifted up to god while you are working and you are working for God. Now, to work for God means not this business of working and looking at God, but working in such a way that your work is your union with God....[I]f I work properly, with my heart set on the truth of the work, this counts as a prayer because in this I am united with God. Not just that I am doing his will but that I am also seeking him in the truth of what I'm doing (92, 93).

In his December 12, 1960 letter to Andrews, Merton expressed the hope of writing a book on the Shakers; to that end he had borrowed two of Andrews' books. Merton indicated that he would not rush through the project because he needed to honor the "careful and honest principles" of the Shakers through a deep, reverent and loving study of them (108). Moreover, he wrote, "I feel all the more akin to them because our own Order, the Cistercians, originally had the same kind of ideal of honesty, simplicity, good work, for a spiritual motive" (108).

Besides the simplicity of architectural line and their work ethic, Merton also loved [the Shaker] dance. In fact, he wrote "The General Dance," as the final chapter of *New Seeds of Contemplation* (1961) when he became interested in the Shakers. That section is a perennial favorite, which at the current time of Holy Easter 2004, calls for repetition of its theme of new life.

The Lord plays and diverts Himself in the garden of His creation, and if we could go out of our own obsession with what we think is the meaning of it all, we might be able to hear His call and follow Him in His mysterious, cosmic dance... when, like the Japanese poet Basho we hear an old frog land in a quiet pond with a solitary splash—at such times the awakening, the turning inside out of all values, the 'newness', the emptiness and the purity of vision that makes themselves evident, provide a glimpse of the cosmic dance.

For the world and time are the dance of the Lord in emptiness. The silence of the spheres is the music of a wedding feast... no despair of ours can alter the reality of things, or stain the joy of the cosmic dance which is always there. Indeed, we are in the midst of it, and it is in the midst of us, for it beats in our very blood, whether we want it to or not.

Yet the fact remains that we are invited to forget ourselves on purpose, cast our awful solemnity to the winds and join in the general dance (52-53).

This little work is a precious treasure for meditation and reflection by one of America's best known monks. Its editor, Paul Pearson, captures well the spirit of Shaker and Cistercian spirituality in his own Preface and opening chapter.

Mary Foreman, OSB

O'CONNELL, Patrick F. (ed.), *The Vision of Thomas Merton: Essays in Honor of Robert E. Daggy* (Notre Dame: Ave Maria Press, 2003), pp. 253. ISBN 0-87793-991-8 (paperback). \$14.95.

Following two previous collections of essays—*The Message of Thomas Merton*¹ and *The Legacy of Thomas Merton*,² both edited by Brother Patrick Hart—*The Vision of Thomas Merton* marks an important continuation of such studies. This particular set of sapid essays demonstrate Merton's almost global applicability as well