

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.

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**

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

collection of Merton's writings arranged for use on a private retreat. Such works can be valuable and effective, but this is not one of them. Then, perhaps one can expect to find a previously unpublished set of Merton's retreat notes edited by Pennington. This would also be a contribution to Merton studies. But, alas, it is neither Merton's retreat notes nor the author's notes taken during a retreat with Merton. In fact, it is not a retreat with Thomas Merton at all. Rather, it is a collection of reflections on a variety of topics which occurred to the author during a week long stay at the Merton hermitage.

What might be of interest to a student or admirer of Merton?

First, there are a number of Merton's photographs of the hermitage and its environs, but most of them have been published elsewhere. Second, there is some information on changes at the hermitage and the monastery since the time of Merton. Third, there are brief references to a tape to which the author is listening and a few quotes from Merton's works and letters. Thus, one must conclude that the book's contribution to Merton studies is miniscule.

How does the author perceive his work?

The author himself refers to the work as a "little journal" and justifies its publication on the grounds that his earlier published journals were well received especially because of their references to his own struggles. One certainly gets an idea as to what is troubling the author at this point in time, even if one's sympathies are less than total. Beyond that, the author claims that "the pages of this journal also share a good bit of Father Louis's journey" (p. 4). This is a nebulous claim not clarified in the ensuing work. Similarly, the author claims that in listening to some of Merton's tapes and reading some of the texts stacked in a corner of the hermitage "I had valuable new insights into [Merton's] mind and heart. These insights ask to be shared" (p. 4). In actuality, people familiar with Merton will find very few insights which are either new or valuable. Merton's own words still stand as the best key to his mind and heart.

Why was the author at the hermitage?

M. Basil Pennington states that he came to the hermitage for basically two reasons. First, he had just completed two years of reading Merton

and came here to get a focus for a book he was writing while listening to some of Merton's tapes (the book would later be published as *Thomas Merton, Brother Monk*). Second, the author seeks a prayerful respite from his own hectic publishing and traveling schedule and needs time to sort out some vocational and personal problems.

One would think that planning a book, praying and sorting out one's life would be enough to keep anyone busy for a week. For some reason the author also felt constrained to write this volume. Perhaps a real insight into its *raison d'être* is found in the following:

Why do I write these words? They don't really say what I want to say. I am a word maker. It makes money for the Abbey. It is better than making Trappist Preserves — at least I would prefer to make words than jelly All I have is His gift. The more he uses it the better. (pp. 96-97)

In this revealing passage one finds clues to the author's problems with his Abbot / Community, to why he writes, and to the difficulties that can occur when a divinely mandated writer faces psychological, literary and vocational problems. Reviewers have no such divine imperative and must fall back on such mundane considerations as a work's literary integrity, or its scholarship, or its contribution to a field, or its depth of insight. Unfortunately, while some of Pennington's work would rank above average in some of these areas, this one fails in all of them.

One would hope that we will not be deluged by books claiming value because their author was on retreat at Merton's hermitage. If such a recognized spiritual writer and Merton scholar as Basil Pennington can fall into this trap, what are we to expect from lesser lights?