

Notes

1. Mark 5: 36 (healing of Jairus' daughter) or John 20:19 (Jesus to disciples after the resurrection); on Merton and fear as a source of war, "The Root of War is Fear," originally published in *The Catholic Worker*, October 1961. A version appeared as Chapter 16 of *New Seeds of Contemplation* (New York: New Directions, 1962).

2. Thomas Merton, *Conjectures of a Guilty Bystander* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1966), p. 12.

3. William H. Shannon, ed., *The Hidden Ground of Love: The Letters of Thomas Merton on Religious Experience and Social Concerns* (New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 1985), p. 126; letter to Dona Luisa Coomerawamy, January 13, 1961.

4. Thomas Merton, *Contemplation in a World of Action* (New York: Doubleday, 1971), p. 149.

Paul R. Dekar

MERTON, Thomas, *Pre-Benedictine Monasticism: Initiation into the Monastic Tradition* 2. Edited with an Introduction by Patrick F. O'Connell. Preface by Sidney H. Griffith. Monastic Wisdom Series 9 (Kalamazoo, Michigan: Cistercian Publications, 2006), pp. lxix + 391. ISBN 0-87907-073-0 (paperback). \$24.95.

Pre-Benedictine Monasticism represents a renewed attempt on the part of Thomas Merton to introduce monastic novices to the riches of ancient monastic spirituality. These notes are the basis for two lecture series that Merton gave to a newly combined novitiate of lay brothers and choir monks from early 1963 until August 15, 1965, five days before leaving for the hermitage. Compared to the previously published *Cassian and the Fathers*, which contains Merton's notes for lectures delivered on the same topic from 1955 to 1962,¹ these lecture series are chronologically more focused and culturally more diverse. Merton limits himself to the fourth through sixth centuries, and his coverage of Syriac monasticism constitutes half of the course. The Preface by Sidney H. Griffith, one of today's premier scholars of Syriac Christianity and of Ephrem in particular, helps the reader understand just how pioneering Merton's interest in the Syriac tradition was for the mid-1960s.

As with *Cassian and the Fathers*, Patrick F. O'Connell has expertly edited and annotated Merton's lecture notes. O'Connell's helpful Introduction of fifty-nine pages discusses the historical context of the lecture series. They were originally conceived as an account of the Latin sources that directly influenced the *Rule of St.*

Benedict, but developed in the course of their writing into a survey of monastic writers, both western and eastern, who lived before the composition of the *Rule* (traditionally dated ca. 540). O'Connell traces the writing of the two lecture series through Merton's comments in his letters and his journals, summarizing the main topics of the lectures in the process. He discusses how Merton's written notes compare with his oral delivery (recordings of all but one of them exist), noting Merton's use of humor, his commentary on current events, and his interest in making the material relevant for the monks of his monastery. Appendix B (pp. 359–362) is a table of correspondences between the written lecture series and the recordings. The Introduction concludes with a discussion of the textual witnesses for *Pre-Benedictine Monasticism*, and in Appendix A (pp. 339–358) O'Connell has supplied textual notes. Once again, he is to be commended for his meticulous attention to detail in the editing of this text.

As I said in my review of *Cassian and the Fathers*, scholars and others interested in the thought and personality of Merton will find in this book a hitherto largely inaccessible aspect of the man which complements and at times contrasts with the "public" Merton found in his works written for publication, the "interpersonal" Merton revealed in his letters, and the "intimate" Merton unveiled in his recently-published journals. This work thus constitutes a unique perspective for those engaged in the retrieval of Merton's ideas and in the reconstruction of his monastic and personal identity. Yet as this book is published in Cistercian Publications' Monastic Wisdom Series, in this review I would like to answer the following question, as suggested by the subtitle: would it be any good for initiating monastic novices or others into the monastic tradition? A reply to this question requires looking at the two lecture series in some detail.

Merton's first lecture series begins with a statement of its purpose: to help his students gain a deeper understanding of *The Rule of Benedict* by situating him in his historical context (p. 4). Merton seeks to disabuse his students of the then-prevailing notion of Benedict's uniqueness. Rather, Merton wants his students to appreciate how much Benedict is indebted to the preceding monastic tradition. As mentioned earlier, Merton does not stick to this plan, but goes where his enthusiasm takes him. The first lecture series then deals with Greek and Latin sources: Paulinus of Nola (pp. 10–13), Martin of Tours (pp. 13–17), Antony (pp. 17–24),

Rufinus (pp. 24–40), John Cassian (pp. 40–72), Pachomian monasticism (pp. 72–123), Basil of Caesarea (pp. 123–151), Roman monasticism in Palestine (pp. 151–169), and Égeria (pp. 169–187), and has two appendices.

The brief sketches of Paulinus of Nola and Martin of Tours focus more on their lives than their monastic doctrine. Merton then turns to Antony. Unlike in *Cassian and the Fathers* (pp. 31–39), where Merton's treatment of Antony's doctrine depends solely on the *Life of Antony*, here Merton discusses Antony's apophthegmata as "the best, simplest, most authentic resumé of Antonian spirituality" (p. 20). Unfortunately, his treatment of these apophthegmata is a mere summary of their themes without much commentary. So while Merton's recognition that one cannot rely solely on Athanasius's *Life of Antony* to understand the historical Antony and his teaching is a step in the right direction, his failure to discuss his sayings in any detail, as well as the letters of Antony—today widely accepted as authentic, though such was not the case in Merton's time—compromises the effectiveness of this section for today's audience. Because of Merton's brevity here, his discussion of the *Life* is more successful in *Cassian and the Fathers* to which the informed reader may go.

Merton next turns to Rufinus and John Cassian. In his section on the former, he focuses primarily on Rufinus's translation of the *Historia Monachorum*. Merton emphasizes Rufinus's role in the transmission of Greek monastic teaching into Latin, then discusses at length the *Historia Monachorum* as "one of the main sources of Antonian spirituality" (p. 28). He gives a good summary of the monastic doctrine in the Prologue and in Chapter 1, on John of Lycopolis, then discusses select chapters of interest to him. Merton's discussion of this important text is unfortunately based on the derivative Latin version of Rufinus (which differs significantly at times from the original Greek), so those interested in the original Greek version will have to look elsewhere. Nonetheless, this lengthy discussion of the work of the under-appreciated Rufinus is valuable. Merton's section on Cassian (pp. 40–72) nicely complements his extensive treatment in *Cassian and the Fathers* because he had recently come across Salvatore Marsili's book that compared Evagrius of Pontus and Cassian. This results in a fresh treatment of *Conferences* 1, 3, 9, 10, and 14 informed by Marsili's scholarship.

Though Merton had discussed Pachomius and Pachomian monasticism in *Cassian and the Fathers* (pp. 39–45), his treatment

here is far better. In his earlier treatment, Merton was limited to using Jerome's Latin translation of the Pachomian rules. Here he avails himself of recent scholarship on Pachomius done by Louis Lefort and Heinrich Bacht. Merton tries to counter the view that Pachomian monasticism represents a "purer" strand of Egyptian monasticism opposed to the Antonian strand (i.e. Origenist-Evagrian). Merton provides an excellent summary of Pachomian spirituality (pp. 80-94) and the coenobitic ideal of Pachomius and its operation (pp. 94-107). While Merton annoyingly keeps insisting that Pachomian monasticism is not opposed to eremiticism—a concern foreign to the sources—on the whole these two sections provide an excellent synthesis of many Pachomian notions and practices. His section on Pachomian monasticism includes summaries of and commentary upon of the *Vita Pachomii* (pp. 107-114) and the *Doctrina Orsiesii* (pp. 114-118), and concludes with a section of Shenoute, whom Merton views as "the outstanding figure of late Pachomian monachism" (p. 120). While Merton relies solely on secondary scholarship in this discussion, it is remarkable that he includes this still-understudied figure at all.

Merton next turns to Basil of Caesarea, whom he had treated only briefly in *Cassian and the Fathers* (pp. 45-51). Merton's lengthier discussion here is far superior. He begins by judiciously discussing Basil's life, his notion of a monastic "rule," and the influence of Eustathius of Sebasteia upon him (pp. 123-129). Merton here offers an insightful interpretation of Basil's well-known censure of hermits (p. 128). Merton then comments on a number of "Basilian" texts (while all of these were viewed in antiquity as authored by Basil, modern scholarship has judged that some of them are not by him): *Letter 2 to Gregory Nazianzen* (pp. 129-133), the *Sermo Asceticus* (pp. 133-137), the *Admonition to a Spiritual Son* (pp. 137-145),² and the *Asceticon* (pp. 145-151).³ Each of these is an excellent summary and discussion of the main points of these texts, though perhaps Merton's choices for discussion are at times idiosyncratic.

The next section, on Roman monasticism in Palestine, is more satisfying than a similar section in *Cassian and the Fathers* (pp. 60-69). He briefly describes the monasticism of Jerome and Paula at Bethlehem, and that of the two Melanias on the Mount of Olives (pp. 152-156). Merton then considers some texts. He provides an outline of the *Life of St. Melania the Younger* (pp. 156-159) and summarizes Jerome's controversy with Vigilantius, who had impugned

monks (pp. 159–162), concluding the latter by saying: “Jerome argues like a Kentucky politician” (p. 162)! This section concludes with a nice discussion of Jerome’s monastic ideas (pp. 162–169).

What comes next is without parallel in *Cassian and the Fathers*: an interesting discussion of the *Pilgrimage of Egeria*. Merton reviews the scholarship concerning the actual name of the author of this text (still a much-disputed question) and summarizes the biblical character of her spirituality, her understanding of pilgrimage, and her view of monks. He then runs through her descriptions of the monks she encounters. While most of this is a mere list of details, it concludes with a scholarly discussion of the term “apostates,” one of Egeria’s names for monks (pp. 184–187). Merton has chosen to discuss this text, which he admits has scanty substantial monastic doctrine, because it provides a picture of ancient monasticism “somewhat different” (p. 187) than the patterns already discussed in Egypt and Palestine.

The first appendix to the first lecture series (pp. 188–190) is a collection of ancient monastic texts on liturgical chant that reveal the diversity of opinion on the topic. When commenting on Diadochos’s view, Merton reveals his own: “This is a saner and more moderate view, which holds that *chant is sometimes very useful and good* but does not simply equate spiritual prayer with good singing” (p. 190). The second appendix (pp. 191–208) deals with Ammonas, the disciple of Antony. Ammonas was a recent discovery of Merton’s (cf. O’Connell’s introduction, pp. xxxii–xxxv), and his enthusiasm for Ammonas is evident in his discussion. Ammonas remains an understudied figure, and Merton’s treatment is an excellent introduction to the texts attributed to him.

In the first lecture series, while Merton’s treatment of individual figures may at times be deficient and outdated in light of more recent scholarship, on the whole his discussion of particular texts is very good. Merton was a careful and insightful reader of ancient monastic literature, and had the rare ability to digest the main themes of any text and re-express them succinctly. This is the great value of first lecture series in *Pre-Benedictine Monasticism*. Coupled with his critical engagement with some of the best monastic scholarship of his day, Merton’s consideration of the many classic monastic texts that he discusses remains a valuable introduction to these texts. A reader of ancient monastic literature would be well served by taking Merton as initial guide through the texts he discusses.

We turn now to the second lecture series, on Syriac monasticism. Merton's treatment of Mesopotamian and Syrian monasticism in *Cassian and the Fathers* was less than satisfying, being little more than a list of names. Furthermore, Merton viewed Syrian monasticism as defective for its extremism, betraying an implicit comparison to the "norms" of the desert fathers or Benedictine monasticism that does not obtain historically. It was apparently Merton's recent reading of the scholarship of Arthur Vööbus that led him to re-evaluate the Syriac tradition. The discussion of Syriac monasticism begins with a review of Syriac Christianity: its influences, its origins, its early figures, movements, and literature (pp. 213–219), for which Merton is entirely dependent on Vööbus, whose views were subject to debate in the 1960s, and remain so today. Better sketch-introductions to Syriac Christianity than Merton's are plentiful today. Next Merton deals with Theodoret (pp. 219–231), Aphrahat (pp. 232–241), Ephrem (pp. 242–274), Syrian monastic rules (pp. 275–279), and Philoxenus of Mabbug (pp. 279–325), and concludes with five brief appendices.

Merton first summarizes several of the more interesting chapters of Theodoret's *Religious History*, occasionally adding a comment or two about ascetic practices, prayer, and the coenobitic life (pp. 219–229), then provides a résumé of Theodoret's monastic doctrine, based on the scholarship of Pierre Canivet and A. J. Festugière (pp. 229–231). All in all, this section is a mere recounting of details and largely derivative. This same holds true for the section on Aphrahat, where Merton heavily depends on the scholarship of Irénée Hausherr for his introduction (pp. 232–234). Then Merton launches into a long summary of Aphrahat's sixth *Demonstration*, entitled *On Monks* (pp. 234–241), but without much commentary. In his treatments of Theodoret and Aphrahat, Merton, very dependent on others' scholarship, seems not to have thought too deeply about what he read, content to summarize rather than analyze.

The same trend continues when Merton comes to discuss Ephrem, where he depends upon the scholarship of Edmund Beck and others. After a brief introduction (pp. 242–244), Merton summarizes Ephrem's doctrine under nine headings (pp. 244–257): (1) church, (2) nature (here Merton summarizes the *Memre on the Blessing of the Table*, pp. 245–249), (3) the world, (4) faith, (5) prayer, (6) fasting and watching, (7) virginity and monasticism, (8) devotion to Mary, and (9) miscellaneous topics. The fifth through seventh

items receive the most attention, reflective as they are of Merton's own interests. Merton then intends to look at some of Ephrem's themes by examining particular writings in more detail, but winds up merely summarizing their contents. First, he discusses the *Hymns on Paradise* (pp. 259–267). Here one finds a surprising section in which Merton compares the doctrine of the *Hymns on Paradise* to Origen's doctrine of creation, drawing on the work of Vladimir Lossky. Next Merton summarizes a text attributed to Ephrem in the Ethiopian tradition, but which Merton admits is misattributed. He nonetheless discusses it because it deals with monastic formation and hermits (pp. 267–271). Finally, Merton summarizes Ephrem's *Hymns on Virginity* (pp. 271–274) and concludes by citing a prayer attributed to Ephrem by Alcuin of York (p. 274). In dealing with Ephrem, Merton appears to engage very little with his thought and the treatment of him is haphazard.

After a brief summary of Syrian monastic rules and their themes (pp. 275–279), Merton turns to Philoxenus of Mabbug. He begins by summarizing Philoxenus's life, works, homilies, and doctrine, drawing from Eugène Lemoine's introduction to his translation (pp. 279–284). Merton then discusses his homilies and letters, not sequentially but thematically (pp. 284–); here for the first time when discussing the Syriac material he really seems engaged by it.

Merton is at his best when he discusses Philoxenus, showing himself analytical and insightful. Notable are the sections on simplicity (pp. 289–294), silence (p. 295), the vocation to the desert (pp. 298–309), and fornication (pp. 320–325). In discussing Philoxenus's teaching on gluttony and temperance (pp. 309–318), Merton strangely adds texts from Pachomius on asceticism (pp. 318–320).

Following upon the excellent treatment of Philoxenus, Merton concludes the second lecture series with five appendices. The first concerns itself with the identity, writings, and teaching of the Abbot Mark cited in the *Philokalia* (pp. 325–329); the second and third with, respectively, the Palestinian monks Theodosius (pp. 329–331) and John the Hesychast (pp. 331–333); the fourth with the Ethiopian church and its monasticism (pp. 333–335); and the fifth with the prayer of Cyrillonas (pp. 335–337). Each of these appendices appear to be more or less notes taken by Merton in the course of reading recent scholarship.

Indeed, the entire second lecture series, with the exception of the section on Philoxenus, has the character of reading notes rather

than lecture notes. A reader interested in mere summaries—albeit at times quite idiosyncratic—of the main works of the Syriac figures discussed by Merton will not be disappointed. But the reader who would take the second lecture series as his or her first-time guide through these writers and their texts could do better by reading more recent scholarship. For, unlike in the first lecture series, Merton's typical insightfulness and ability to digest the main themes of any text and re-express them succinctly is not evident (excepting the treatment of Philoxenus). This seems to be due to the fact that Merton was encountering these texts for the first time and had yet to digest them, whereas he had reflected on the texts discussed in the first lecture series for many years. In conclusion, then, to anyone interested in being initiated into the riches of the monastic tradition, I would recommend the entire first lecture series, especially the sections from Rufinus and Cassian onward, but only the section on Philoxenus from the second lecture series. These sections contain much that is valuable and helpful for understanding the ancient monastic tradition. Accordingly, Merton's *Pre-Benedictine Monasticism* constitutes another fine addition to Cistercian Publications' new Monastic Wisdom Series.

Notes

1. Thomas Merton, *Cassian and the Fathers: Initiation into the Monastic Tradition*. Edited with an Introduction by Patrick F. O'Connell. Foreword by Patrick Hart, OCSO. Preface by Columba Stewart, OSB. Monastic Wisdom Series 1 (Kalamazoo, Michigan: Cistercian Publications, 2005). See my review in *The Merton Annual* 19 (2006), pp. 400–7.

2. O'Connell has omitted listing the recent translation of this important text: Robert Rivers and Harry Hagan, "The *Admonitio ad Filium Spirituale*: Introduction and Translation," *American Benedictine Review* 53.2 (2002), pp. 121–46.

3. There is a new translation of the *Asceticon* not mentioned by O'Connell: Anna Silvas, *The Ascetikon of St. Basil the Great* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).

Mark DelCogliano

HARFORD, James, *Merton & Friends: A Joint Biography of Thomas Merton, Robert Lax, and Edward Rice* (New York: Continuum, 2006), pp. 336. ISBN 13: 978-0-8264-1869-2 (hardcover). \$35.95.

The task of writing a joint biography for three close friends whose very productive lives were intertwined for thirty years is one that