

A WORTHY EFFORT

Review of

THE LEGACY OF THOMAS MERTON

Edited by Brother Patrick Hart

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—Reviewed by **Anthony T. Padovano**

Few people have been as impressive as Brother Patrick Hart in organizing and assisting Merton studies in the almost twenty years since Merton's death. The Legacy of Thomas Merton is one more addition to the library of studies about Merton. Patrick Hart leads the way with three contributions to the volume: the forward, the introduction and an essay. Eleven other writers offer reflections on various aspects of Merton's work. The twelve essays deal with prayer and the Orient, journey and culture, correspondence and poetry, eremiticism and spirituality, ecclesiology and peace, biography and memoir.

The volume opens with Patrick Hart's Introduction in which he underscores the concern of Merton that monastic life not be seen as an apostolic or educational enterprise but as a value in its own right. The monastery is a sign to the world, a sacred symbol. It exists less to provide a service than to become a prophetic statement about values humanity needs for its own enrichment.

Michael Casey writes about prayer and keeps a balance between the intense individualism of Merton and the absolute need he had for the community at Gethsemani to organize his life for him. Casey sees Merton's life as a parable for our time warning us not to lose our humanity in our head-long effort to amass money and power.

Chu-Cong and Costello explore the East-West convergence in Merton's thought. Chu-Cong finds a similarity in Buddhist emptiness and Christian poverty of spirit; he sees a difference in the personal love of Christians for Christ and the "impersonal" approach of Buddhists to Buddha. Costello tells us that Merton learned in the East the value of knowing everything and rejecting nothing.

Lawrence Cunningham writes an intelligent and insightful essay. He sees the final, long poems of Merton's life as artifacts of his consciousness, mandalas rather than mosaics, works almost autonomous in their capacity to exist without reference to the poet. Victor Kramer offers further analysis of the poetry, organizes it into four helpful stages and unifies the poetic corpus under the theme of encounter with monastic life.

There are other extremely useful insights in the remaining essays. Jean Leclercq compares Merton to Maritain; Elena Malits wisely observes that autobiography and journey are the best vantage points for a study of Merton; Gordon Zahn writes tellingly of Merton's pacifism.

The volume begins with Michael Casey's essay on prayer and ends with Abbot Timothy Kelly's memoir. Patrick Hart does well in keeping the organizing principle for Merton's work in the realm of the spiritual and the monastic. A life so rich in diversity and genius needs someone to help us sort out the unifying and underlying themes. Patrick Hart does this effectively. He has accomplished his task not only by keeping the central ideas central but by inviting an impressive number of writers to comment on Merton. There is not a single essay in this volume which is unworthy of Hart's efforts or of Merton's life.

Anthony T. Padovano, Catholic theologian and writer, also comments on Merton's Eighteen Poems in this issue.