

works, but are no less important for that! Other pieces are original to the journal. I was particularly interested in the piece about Nasr, written by the journal's editor Canon Martin Tunnicliffe, and the piece on icons.

I am afraid that it is in some of the articles original to the journal that my only reservation lies. The FCP was founded by the late R.G. Coulson, and is rightly and not surprisingly both imbued with his vision of the contemplative and committed to his method of spiritual exercises. As a newcomer to the FCP, the extracts from the writings of Coulson himself, and the expositions from it, proved something of a challenge. I suspect that the full benefit of the journal will be enjoyed by those who are members of a local FCP group, and who have had the opportunity both to study and to put into practise the vision of their founder. At the back of the journal, the reader is warned that Coulson's works 'are not easy reading'. Furthermore, 'They are best understood in the context of the reader's following the contemplative way along the lines that the author himself followed and suggested for others' (p. 27).

However, for all that, the journal is well worth a look. It is witness again to the extraordinary and wonderful diversity of the contemplative vision. Copies are available for £1.95 + 0.50 postage from Mrs Carol Binnie, 1 Bachelor's Cottage, Long Reach, Ockham, Woking, Surrey GU23 6PG. Further information about the FCP is available from the same address (SAE requested).

Peter C. King

Merton, Gethsemani and the Cistercian Tradition: Short Reviews by Paul Pearson

Over the last year a number of books have been published which may be of interest to readers of *The Merton Journal*. This review will merely give a brief introduction to them so that readers know of their existence and can delve further if they so wish.

Solitude and Love of the World. Thomas Merton. (Tunbridge Wells, Kent: Burns and Oates, 1997) pp.141. ISBN 0-86012-278-6. £6.95.

This slim volume from Burns and Oates contains four of the essays originally published in the collection *Contemplation in a World of Action*. That volume has not been available for a number of years and it is good to have some of the essays from it available once again. The essays selected for this volume by Roland Walls are 'Christian Solitude,' 'The Cell,' 'The Case for a Renewal of Eremiticism in the Monastic State' and 'Is the Contemplative Life Finished?' These particular essays were selected 'for their relevance to a wider monastic audience' especially, Walls notes, because of their relevance to the growth in vocations to the solitary life which have increased dramatically in the thirty years since Merton's death. It is a shame that this volume only contains four of the essays from the final two sections of *Contemplation in a World of Action* and that some of the other excellent essays in the much longer section on 'Monastic Renewal' were not included, such as Merton's classic reflection on the relationship of his monastic life to the world - 'Is the World a Problem?' - or his essays on the role of the contemplative in the modern world.

Mornings with Thomas Merton: Readings and Reflections selected by John C. Blattner. (Ann Arbor, Michigan: Servant Publications, 1998) ISBN 1-56955-009-3. £9.39.

My first impression of this book was that it would make an ideal gift - it is relatively small, attractively presented and would serve as a good introduction to Merton. The book contains 120 daily readings selected from a limited number of works by Merton. Blattner's intention had been to "bring together samples of Merton's writing that I hope will contribute to the reader's devotional life." The readings were taken mostly from *The Water of Siloe* and *The Seven Storey Mountain* with a smaller number from *The Sign of Jonas* and *No Man is an Island*. The texts selected from the latter two volumes were well chosen though they make up the smaller part of this book. Those from *The Waters of*

Siloe were more historical than 'devotional' and did not lend themselves to being read as short daily passages, and those from *The Seven Storey Mountain* were more autobiographical. Sadly I was rather disappointed in this book and felt that John Blattner had missed an excellent opportunity. The majority of the real spiritual gems from Merton's writing were missing from this volume, *Thoughts in Solitude*, *Seeds of Contemplation*, *Conjectures of a Guilty Bystander*, *A Vow of Conversation*, to mention just a few! There is certainly a space in the market for a selection of daily readings from Merton, a space *Mornings with Thomas Merton* does not fill.

Thomas Merton: Poet, Prophet, Priest. By Jennifer Fisher Bryant. (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans Books for Young Readers, 1997) pp.207. ISBN 0-8028-5140-1. £4.99.

This book is a biography of Thomas Merton aimed at younger readers, most likely those in their pre- or early teens unlike David Collins' book *Thomas Merton: Monk with a Mission* which was aimed at a much younger age group. Merton's life story is presented well, largely based on material from the biographies of him by Michael Mott and Monica Furlong, with a limited but well chosen selection of quotations from his own work. There are also a good collection of photographs which help to bring the story to life. Unusual terms used by Bryant are simply and unobtrusively explained though I would not have described the Carthusian order as 'a less severe, more socially inclined order' than the Cistercians or Dante's *Divine Comedy* as a 'medieval miracle play.' The book also contains a number of other factual mistakes which could have been easily avoided. Having said that Bryant's book is an appealing presentation of Merton, she is concise in retelling his life and yet captures some of Merton's vigour and zest for life in a way that will appeal to her target audience and reflects something of the Merton who could engage with young people as witnessed to by some of the letters in *A Road to Joy*.

The following two books are concerned with Cistercian monasticism and I doubt that two more contrasting books on it can be found!

Holy Folly: Short and Tall Tales from the Abbey of Gethsemani. By Brother Paul Quenon, Brother Gueric Plante and Father Timothy Kelly. (Windsor, Ontario: Black Moss Press, 1998) pp.132. ISBN 0-88753-313-2.

In this volume three monks of the Abbey of Gethsemani share an eclectic collection of stories about monastic life and the individuals who have, and are, living it at Gethsemani. As they claim, it is a different part of the story that Merton revealed through his writings and that is indeed true. Yet the short stories that make up this collection, bizarre as they are at times, reflect not only the crankiness of human nature but also something of the divinity it shares. The stories in the collection reminded me of the stories that families pass on from one generation to the next, stories about Great Uncle Schubert and Cousin Fanny, stories that are unique to each family as these are to the monastic family at Gethsemani. Some readers may question the propriety in the publication of these stories and yet they stand to show us a side of the monastic family that is rarely seen and which reminds the reader of the one humanity we all share. The style of the three contributors to this volume varies enormously from Brother Paul's fairly short, pithy entries, through Brother Gueric's stories to the entries of Father Timothy which are in fact the homilies he has given at the funerals of a number of Gethsemani monks and, it is these latter entries which I found the most rewarding of the whole book.

Studies in Irish Cistercian History. By Colmcille Ó Conbhuidhe. OCSO. Edited by Finbarr Donovan. (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 1998) pp.260. ISBN 1-85182-379-6. £14.95.

This volume is a collection of scholarly papers originally published in journals such as *Citeaux* and *Collectanea Cisterciensia* by Colmcille Ó Conbhuidhe, one of the outstanding scholars of medieval Ireland and of Irish Cistercian history. These essays cover the history of the Irish Cistercians from their decline and attempted reform beginning in the second half of the fifteenth century, through the dissolution of the monasteries, the war of the Confederation and concludes with the

death of the last Irish Cistercian monk of Holy Cross Abbey in the mid eighteenth century. Father Colmcille's chapters are eloquent and fascinating as they cover an area of history that was new to me and, I would imagine, to many of the readers of *The Merton Journal*. The quality of the typescript varied from chapter to chapter which I found disappointing in a volume of this price. I would recommend this book to readers with a specific interest in Cistercian history in these Isles.



Our Reviewers

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Peter C. King is Chairman of the Thomas Merton Society of Great Britain and Ireland. His book, *Dark Night Spirituality: Contemplation and the New Paradigm*, is published by SPCK.