

This quotation gets to the very core of Merton's literary work and in *The Intimate Merton* we have the essence of those journals in one volume. If you like to read Thomas Merton and you have not read his complete journals then this book is a must.

Paul M Pearson.

*Merton and Sufism: The Untold Story*. Edited by Rob Baker and Gray Henry. pp. 340, Louisville, KY. Fons Vitae, 1999. ISBN: 188775207 2.

The appearance of *Merton and Sufism: The Untold Story* marks a long overdue development in the plethora of materials about Thomas Merton. Much has been written on Merton as a leading figure in the field of inter-faith dialogue but this has largely concentrated so far on his writing and thought about Zen Buddhism. This has been due to the fact that Merton saw three books relating to this area into print in his own lifetime and also that his final journey ended in Asia. But Merton's inter-faith dialogue was far broader than that and this book provides an excellent introduction to another equally important aspect of Merton's thought - his appreciation and dialogue with the Sufi mystics of Islam.

This book brings together in a well presented volume articles about Merton and Islam, Merton's own writings on Islam and the Sufi mystics, some transcripts of talks he gave to the Gethsemani community about Sufism, and a variety of other pieces. It provides a real kaleidoscope on this area of his thought. Some pieces are reprints whilst others appear here for the first time. As in most collections of this kind the quality varies though all make a contribution to the portrait they paint of this aspect of Merton's thought.

The first three articles by Burton Thurston, Bonnie Thurston and Sidney Griffith examine, respectively, Merton's reflections on Sufism, his interest in Islam and Merton's contact with Louis Massignon. These chapters provide an excellent introduction to this area of Merton's thought and if readers read no more than these three chapters their understanding of Merton's wide horizons will have been broadened. Bonnie Thurston begins her essay with a most apposite quote from a 1962 letter of Merton's to Abdul Aziz which, as she points out, is as relevant today as it was then:

It seems to me that mutual comprehension between Christians and Moslems is something of vital importance today, and unfortunately it is rare and uncertain, or else subjected to the vagaries of politics. (40)

These three writers make it clear that Merton undertook this task himself so that "Merton's knowledge of Sufism had reached a point where a non-Muslim

could go no further than he had gone" (33) - a comment similar to one made by D.T. Suzuki regarding Merton's understanding of Zen. Bonnie then highlights simply, and with great clarity, why Thomas Merton was so interested in Islam, noting in particular the parallels between the prayer of the heart and *dhikr*. This theme is developed by Griffiths and also by Erlinda Paguio in one of the next essays in this volume, a careful analysis of the Sufi themes in Merton's poetry. She notes in particular the themes of the true and false self, the concept of the "spark in the soul" and the thought of Eckhart and Hasidic writers in whom Merton was also interested. It is a real bonus that Merton's Sufi poems are included as an appendix to this volume, along with a number of other book reviews he wrote relating to Sufism.

In another excellent essay Sidney Griffith traces the correspondence between Merton and a young Pakistani Muslim, Abdul Aziz. Merton's side of this correspondence, which lasted from 1960 up until Merton's death in 1968, is available in *The Hidden Ground of Love*. Except for excerpts included in this article Aziz's side of the correspondence is yet to be published. Griffith describes their correspondence as "one of the most interesting epistolary exchanges between a Muslim and a Christian in the twentieth century." (102) It is a truly inter-faith dialogue in which Merton also shared personal information and discussed world problems along with issues of faith and practice and Griffith quotes extensively from their correspondence in this latter area.

At this point in the collection transcribed excerpts from Merton's lectures to the Gethsemani community are included. They are ably introduced and arranged by Bernadette Dieker. The recordings of Merton's novitiate conferences and his later conferences to interested members of the monastic community are often met with mixed reactions. Some people find his lectures disappointing as they lack the thoroughness and scholarly nature of his published writings whereas others are delighted to discover the humour and personal nature of these lectures where Merton's gifts as a teacher and spiritual father shine through. By only including excerpts from Merton's lectures on Sufism Dieker has condensed the scholarship present in these conferences and presents the transcriptions in a most readable and intelligent way which highlights the essence of Merton's thought. It is a shame though that she does not include references noting from which conference each transcript is taken as I am sure many readers would be interested in hearing some of the conferences in their entirety.

The final three chapters of this book include a textual examination of Merton's copy of *A Moslem Saint of the Twentieth Century* by Martin Lings which was heavily underlined by Merton; a description of Sidi Abdeslam by Nicole Abadie, a friend and follower of Abdeslam, who served as his translator when he met with Merton at Gethsemani in 1966; and a thorough survey of

Merton's contact with Marco Pallis and other members of the traditionalist school of thought. This essay also includes a very useful and clear survey of Merton's references to Sufis in his reviews, journals, reading notebooks, marginalia and underlinings. Abadie's essay, though a very readable account of her conversion to Islam and how she came to know Abdeslam, does not make a real contribution to this book. Her account of the meeting with Merton is a minor part of the essay as she herself records: "I do not remember exactly what was said...except that they got along and understood each other very well" (189) - a disappointing reminiscence of a visit Merton described in his journal as "momentous."

Overall I found this volume a stimulating and challenging read which opened up for me an area of Merton's thought with which I was not very familiar. At times some of the language was difficult and a glossary would have been a very useful addition to this book, though this reflects my own lack of knowledge of Islam something which Merton and this book challenge me on. I also felt it lacked a good introduction to place the various chapters of this book into their context and to aid the readers movement between the different aspects of Merton's thought on Islam and Sufism contained in it.

I would like to conclude this review with a final challenging comment made by William Chittick in his introduction:

One of the most obvious and striking characteristics of Thomas Merton's mentions and discussions of Islam is precisely his ability to see through the obfuscations of the scholars and his recognition that Islam represents an enterprise of the human spirit as complex and deep as Christianity. It is somewhat less remarkable today to hear a non-Muslim take this position than it was a few years ago, but it is still the position of only a minority of the supposedly qualified observers. (21)

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*The Ladder of the Beatitudes*: Jim Forest, 176 pp. Orbis Books, New York, 1999, ISBN 1 570 75245 1

Jim Forest's book, *The Ladder of the Beatitudes* is likely to be one of those books that will stand the test of time because it spans the wisdom of the ages.

A convert to the Russian Orthodox Church and a friend and correspondent of Thomas Merton, Jim Forest draws on material from a variety of spiritual traditions from the early Fathers to modern writers about peace and justice. Jim Forest is a man who has read and absorbed the great spiritual