

BOOK REVIEWS

The Thomas Merton Encyclopedia. William H. Shannon, Christine M. Bochen and Patrick F. O'Connell. Orbis Books, 2002. ISBN: 1570754268.

In the time since its publication, I have found *The Thomas Merton Encyclopedia* to be a wonderful reference source. As Director of the Thomas Merton Center at Bellarmine University I deal with thousands of Merton related queries every year, frequently I find myself turning to the *Encyclopedia* as my starting point in answering these queries. The *Encyclopedia* has been written by an outstanding team of scholars. William H. Shannon, the general editor of the five volumes of Merton's letters, author of numerous books on Merton, and most recently editor of *The Inner Experience*. Christine M. Bochen editor of *The Courage to Truth*, Merton's letters to literary figures, and volume six of Merton's personal journals, *Learning to Love* as well as the superb introductory collection, *Thomas Merton: Essential Writings*. Patrick F. O'Connell, editor of *The Vision of Thomas Merton* and of *The Merton Seasonal*. In this volume these longtime scholars of Merton have written excellent introductory articles to aspects of Merton's life and work falling into the following four categories: all of Merton's published books; the essential themes of his writings; the persons important in his life; and, to a much lesser degree, the places where he lived. The book goes from "A" for "Abbot" through to "Z" for "Gregory Zilboorg" and contains over 350 entries with many illustrations. Two recent queries I was dealing with related to Merton's writings on the Book of Psalms and on the Holy Spirit. Although there was no specific article in the *Encyclopedia* on the Psalms there was an article about Merton's book *Praying the Psalms* and a more general article on "the bible," both of which were very

helpful in beginning to write a reply to the query I'd been asked.

The entry in the *Encyclopedia* for the "Holy Spirit" provided an outstanding analysis of Merton's thinking and references to the Holy Spirit throughout his literary work, from early comments in writings on St Bernard all the way through to comments he made in Asia in 1968, shortly before his death. This entry, an essay in its own right, brought together a wealth of information on this topic and provides a very good example of the depth and breadth of the knowledge of the authors of this book that strikes the reader in entry after entry.

However, having sung the very worthy praises of this volume, I now want to raise a number of questions which I believe can be addressed in future editions.

In the introduction to this book the authors state that they have

"limited themselves to printed materials. Thus, we have not included electronically recorded talks by Merton." (xvii.)

Although not stated, it must be presumed that manuscript material was also not included. This is a major omission since there are over 600 hours of Merton's recorded conferences and over 60 of his working notebooks in existence, not to mention other substantial amount of manuscript materials. A striking example was the absence of an entry for Merton's "banned book" *Peace in a Post-Christian Era*, or even references to it in otherwise good articles on subjects such as peace, war and censorship. I think the omission of such a large body of material calls into question the use of "encyclopedia" for this volume. It is a extremely fine reference volume, but in no way is it encyclopedic.

I was a little puzzled by some inconsistencies in the volume, for example the authors felt *At Home in the World: The Letters of Thomas*

BOOK REVIEWS

Merton and Rosemary Radford Reuther deserved an entry as did Rosemary Radford Reuther in her own right, but *Survival or Prophecy? An Exchange of Letters, Thomas Merton and Jean Leclercq* [sic] receives an entry whereas readers looking for an entry for Jean Leclercq are referred to the book—he is given no entry of his own, yet his friendship with Merton extended over a long period and his influence on monasticism, and on Merton, was considerable. Another related inconsistency was why *Survival or Prophecy?* was included, ahead of publication, whereas *Dialogues with Silence*, published in 2001 was omitted. Similar examples can be found in each of the four categories treated by the authors. A lengthy entry is included on the Shakers, but Merton's interest in the Celtic monks is omitted. Again, there is a lengthy entry on Merton's writing on Camus, but no entries on Blake, Faulkner or Rilke. Miguel Grinberg is included, but Nicanor Parra excluded. Saint Bonaventure University is included but there is no mention of the Olean Cottage where Merton was staying when he first visited Bonaventures, nor is there a separate entry for the cottage. The only reference I could find to it was in an entry entitled "Novels, Unpublished." Or again, Polonnaruwa is included but Mahabalipuram omitted yet, in Merton's *Asian Journal*, he places his experience at Polonnaruwa on a parallel with his experience at Mahabalipuram. A major omission is the lack of an entry for Dr Robert E. Daggy, the editor of so many of Merton's books, longtime Director and Archivist of the Thomas Merton Center, and one of the central figures in Merton Scholarship and the continuing interest in Merton. Edward Deming Andrews, a friend and correspondent of Merton is not listed. Again, Aelred Graham is an interesting figure omitted, especially with the reversal of his opinion on Merton's work

after his initial critical review in *The Atlantic Monthly* in 1953. I think many of these kinds of omissions are a result of limiting a work of this kind to just three authors; most encyclopedias would draw on a much larger and broader range of experts. From the perspective of a librarian the major drawback I have found with this volume is its lack of either a table of contents or an index. The former would make it much easier to locate entries without having to leaf through the whole volume to see if there is an entry under the topic in question. The latter is, I believe, essential to an encyclopedia. Only through a comprehensive index is it possible to find all the relevant references to a particular subject. For example, information about Owen Merton. There is a good entry about Owen Merton but an index would draw the reader or researcher to other references found elsewhere, such as the example of one of his paintings included in an entry entitled "Art, Theory of" as well as to other likely references made to Owen in articles, for example, such as those relating to Thomas Merton's calligraphies and his drawings. Finally, having described the book as particularly concerned with "the literary output of Thomas Merton" space is still made for the International Thomas Merton Society but not for other Merton societies and organizations, either in the States or elsewhere in the world, even though societies such as the one in the Netherlands pre-dated the ITMS. Even the Thomas Merton Center does not qualify for an entry in its own right! These comments are not meant to detract from the value of this excellent volume which fills an important gap in the world of Merton publishing. I make use of this volume almost daily and have high hopes that future editions will build on its considerable strengths and eliminate its flaws.