

Latin word, phrase or sentence used by Merton in the text is translated.

This volume will provide the non-monastic reader with a wonderful insight into one of the major texts that has shaped Western Monasticism and is, in more recent years, being regularly taught and studied in monasteries. For monastic readers more familiar with the work of Cassian it is also a refreshing look at Cassian as Merton, with natural ease, articulates the essence of his writings.

Paul M Pearson

**Thomas Merton: I Have Seen What I Was Looking For: Selected Spiritual Writings**, edited by M. Basil Pennington (Hyde Park, New York: New City Press, 2005), pp. 260 ISBN: 1565482255. \$19.95

Basil Pennington's anthology *Thomas Merton: I Have Seen What I Was Looking For: Selected Spiritual Writings* was published posthumously after Father Basil's death in early June resulting from injuries sustained in a car accident in late March 2005. Unlike the previous anthologies by Lawrence Cunningham and Christine Bochen this one takes a chronological approach to Merton's writing, rather than a thematic one.

In his short introduction Pennington gives a brief overview of Merton's life and thought, concentrating on his literary output. He situates Merton's writing within the Cistercian tradition comparing Merton's prose to that of St. Bernard, William of St. Thierry, Adam of Perseigne and Gueric of Igny. The first chapter of the anthology consists

of excerpts from Merton's major autobiographical works, largely *The Seven Storey Mountain*, up until his experience in Louisville at the corner of Fourth and Walnut. The passages are well chosen though surprisingly there are no quotations from *The Sign of Jonas*. Pennington's second chapter provides a series of portraits from Merton's writings of those who influenced him, men such as Gandhi, Mark Van Doren, Daisetz Suzuki and Robert Lax. An omission here would be some of the women who influenced him, most noticeably Catherine de Hueck Doherty and Dorothy Day.

The next chapter turns to Merton's early poetry. Pennington points out that "few of Merton's poems can lay claim to having attained anything approaching true greatness" but correctly states that poetry was a literary genre of great personal importance to Merton. Merton's first published book was poetry, he continued to write poetry up until the final days of his life, and his collected poems exceeds one thousand pages. The next two chapters turn to two central aspects of Merton's work – his spiritual writings and his writings on social issues. Pennington suggests that Merton's discovery of *theoria physike* in the writings of Evagrius Ponticus and Maximus the Confessor was central to his spirituality and enabled him to write about "the deepest concerns of every thoughtful person ... in a way that could easily be understood." (95-6) *Theoria physike* transformed him from the "zealous, ascetic, world-despising young monk" (14) to the "concerned monk at the heart of the world" (149) so evident in his later writings. Chapter

six witnesses to the effect this change had on Merton's poetry with excerpts from poems such as "Original Child Bomb," "Hagia Sophia" and Merton's anti-poems *Cables to the Ace* and *The Geography of Lograire*.

Pennington's final chapter points to Merton's expansive Christianity, especially as seen in his writings on other faiths and his mature thinking about the life of the monk and of the Christian in the modern world. The volume concludes with a chronology, publication list and one final, brief chapter, entitled "*apothegmata*." *Apothegmata* was the name given to the pithy sayings of the desert mothers and fathers, similar to koans in the Zen tradition, and in this section Basil Pennington gives us a series of *apothegmata* from Thomas Merton. It serves as a wonderful and highly effective conclusion to this book.

Initially I picked up this volume wondering how it could be different from the anthologies that preceded it. Almost immediately the freshness of Pennington's approach brought Merton's work to life. His unique understanding of Merton is evident in his inclusion in this volume of two sections of poetry, an area of Merton's work overlooked in other anthologies, and in his monastic outlook summed up so well in his conclusion of the book by the collection of *apothegmata*.

Paul M Pearson

### **A Year with Thomas Merton: Daily Meditations from his Journals,**

selected and edited by Jonathan Montaldo (SPCK, 2005), pp. 416, ISBN 0281057389. £12.99

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*Lovely, cold, lonely afternoon, winter afternoon. Rich winter silence and loneliness and fullness into which I entered nearly twenty years ago! These afternoons contain all the inexplicable meaning of my vocation.*

So begins one of the compelling passages Montaldo includes in his classic selection of Merton journal texts assembled in this volume within an imaginary year.

Drawn from Merton's personal journals spanning 27 years, these daily readings follow the rhythm of the changing seasons and present Merton's intimate reflections on many aspects of his monastic experience and vocation. It is absorbing to compare the passionate writing of the young monk and the distilled wisdom of the mature hermit and to observe the deepening of his interior life over time.

There are many beautiful descriptions of the natural world and the landscapes around Gethsemani, and the volume contains nine of Merton's black and white photographs which deepen the sense of place, and six of his pen and ink drawings. Also included are some of Merton's reflections on other concerns close to his heart – theology, war and peace, contacts with other writers, and the vagaries of the world – but this is essentially a profoundly contemplative collection that engenders a stilling of the mind and self.

In his introduction Montaldo says,

*And even though mystically living out connections to all peoples, worlds and*