

struction on *lectio divina* and the reading of the Scriptures generally. Some of Merton's teaching on the mass and particularly on transubstantiation seem very outdated and to come more from the text book than from Merton himself. It is a long read and one has to dig to find those things which would be of help to most of us.

I am a Roman Catholic priest ordained for over fifty years with a deep attachment to the monastic life and to the liturgy, and Merton has been a very helpful guide to me in much of his writing. However, this is not a book that I would recommend to an ordinary lay person seeking to live the Christian life in the world.

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Hidden in the Same Mystery:

Thomas Merton and Loretto

Bonnie Thurston, General Editor

Sr. Mary Swain, SL, Loretto Editor

Fons Vitae

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When Mary Luke Tobin was asked if there was a new interest in Merton, she replied without hesitation:

'I think that an increasing number of people are interested in his thought and especially in his search. Many seem to be looking for a way in which their active response to the critical issues of today can somehow be integrated with a life of faith.' This was in 1978, in an interview which is included in this valuable addition to Merton studies. Anyone present at the latest Thomas Merton International Conference, meeting there the latest generation of students and followers of Merton, would say that that remains just as true today.

We must be grateful therefore to the dedication of those who saw this volume through the press. It is elegantly presented and attractively illustrated. In it we are allowed to watch the progress of a friendship between a monk and nun, something that was often a mutually enriching feature of medieval monastic life. Here we have Trappist men and Loretto women side by side, in a lonely Kentucky valley, who share much in common because of their shared experience of communities begun in the opening up of the American West, and Merton's comments on this are a fascinating insight for British readers: 'a triumph of hope over despair . . . people who accepted as perfectly normal the incongruity and solitude which is the lot of the pioneer'.

In commenting on the talks which form part I of this book Bonnie Thurston makes a parallel with

Merton's talks to the novices (which many of us listened to with such enjoyment on Credence Cassettes) which she describes as informal, rambling, even disorganized, but still of sharp insight. He tells us what we need to know and to hear, time and again, with refreshing clarity: 'One of the things I don't like to talk about is prayer. It is not good to make a great issue out of prayer . . . as soon as you make an issue out of it, it tends to get confused and distorted. Prayer is life. It is our life and comes from the ground of our life.' He is totally down to earth. Addressing the novices about to make their vows on Ascension Day, he said: 'You don't have to rise. You don't have to go anywhere.' This is the constant theme: 'You have to start where you are and stay with it'. He looks at the extremes of impractical idealism and passive realism and shows that Christian reality lies in recognizing that, 'There's a seed that God has planted in all of us, and we have to let it grow in his own way and our role is to provide the love and the assent and submission so that there is the possibility of growth'.

Since Mary Luke Tobin lived so much longer than Merton – and one of the delights is to watch, through the splendid range of photographs that illustrate this book, the change from sister in the full habit to the free and vigorous woman with the energetic body language and the lively eyes – she can tell us about

Merton's final day, at Bangkok in 1968. Many felt disappointed that he had said nothing about converting people to Christianity. Before he walked back to his room, he said quite simply, 'Well, I don't think that is what we are asked to do today. Today I think it's so much more important to so let God live in us that others may feel God and come to believe in God because they feel how God lives in us'. Those were his last words, a beautiful last message as Mary Luke Tobin says in the concluding words of this gentle and inspiring book.

Esther de Waal writes and talks in the area of Christian spirituality, with a great interest in monasticism, particularly Benedictine and Cistercian. Her book on Thomas Merton has recently been re-issued by the Canterbury Press under the title *A Retreat with Thomas Merton*.

Thomas Merton – Contemplation and Political Action

Mario I. Aguilar

SPCK

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Any book about Thomas Merton with the words *contemplation* and *action* in its title immediately draws comparison with Merton's own *Contemplation in a World of Action*, a collection of 22 essays