

for the defects of that Church and the general ineffectiveness of Christianity in coping with human ills. While there is a great deal to be said for the leavening of both theological study and Church structure with much more female talent, the author certainly claims far too much for her panacea since its application would de-christianise the whole enterprise. Her concept of both revelation and Church appears to ignore entirely the—scandalous—particularity of Christ.

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MERTON. MYSTIC AT THE CENTER OF AMERICA. Thomas M. King. (Collegeville, Minn.: A Michael Glazier Book, *The Liturgical Press*, 1992.) 150 pp. \$10.99.

SILENT LAMP. THE THOMAS MERTON STORY. William H. Shannon. (London: *SCM Press*, 1993.) 304 pp., with index. £10.95.

These two books provide insight into aspects of Merton's developing spiritual journey. Both emphasize his growing spiritual awareness of mysticism and of contemplation, and how that awareness inevitably brought his journey back; to the world. Both would be good places to begin a study of Merton, while both are limited in scope.

Merton wrote so much that it is probably impossible for any commentator or author to do him justice in a single volume. These books quite successfully point the way toward further study. Shannon's investigation might be called a supplement to earlier biographical studies (Furlong, Mott, Griffin, Pennington). Its somewhat ironic title "Silent Lamp" refers to Merton's monastic life as an instrument for helping others see, but as we all know Merton was seldom silent. The study by King is more limited in scope, and surely does not convince us that Merton was a "mystic at the center of America". Nevertheless, it does a good job at demonstrating that Merton sought to understand the fundamental role of mysticism in his own life journey.

King arranges his text in four basic narrative sections — Self, Contemplation, Freedom, and Others — encased with an introduction and epilogue. Each chapter, more or less self-contained, deals with the paradoxical realizations of Merton who both sought to deepen his (and others) mystical awareness, and as individual always remained exceedingly "industrious". Thus, while "he talked of disappearing in God . . . his own Nothingness," he usually had to qualify "I am a joyful person. I like life" (p.30), and he kept returning to life.

In his chapter about contemplation, King demonstrates, not surprisingly, that for Merton mysticism flourishes in ordinary circumstances. The section about freedom stresses how Merton became increasingly aware of how exterior discipline should free (monk and others) so they can "deal with a more ultimate struggle"(p. 99). Finally, each individual (Merton stresses) chooses between despair and joy.

King's last chapter, predictably, is "Others". Merton concerned himself with explaining that "achieving purity of heart . . . is not the end, for . . .

there is a work to be done in the world, . . . that can be done only by the contemplative . . . one who is the doer of one's own deeds" (p. (28), and this generates the "social thought" and, finally, involvement with myriads of others. This overview is a good start, but it is sketchy and while it should help others to appreciate Merton, other scholars (Carr, Kilcourse) have packed more into their analyses.

Shannon's story sets a different goal: this is a story which is focused, not on crises, or writing, or monastic patterns), but rather on the essential movements of Merton's life, which are "moments of conversion" (p.7). These are high points revealing the trajectory. Much of this selected material has to be what we've heard before. Thus, of 14 chapters, the first 6 chronicle the years before entering Gethsemani. No doubt important, this is one more distillation.

Shannon's book includes sections which are chronologies of events which are interspersed throughout the text. (Thus, in addition to the 14 chapters there are 8 separate chronologies. Shannon's intent is to show Merton's significant events in relation to the significant events of the world.) Shannon suggests that these sections can be skimmed, or ignored. In fact, they are annoying, as they are interspersed. They might better have been made into an Appendix.

The value of Shannon's "story" is that it shows how Merton kept working to be a better monk, writer, christian, ecumenist, etc. In the chapter about war, race, monastic renewal and religions of the world, Shannon successfully demonstrates critical moments of awareness which did change Merton (and continue to make readers aware and perhaps be changed also).

Shannon's book is a guidebook. Sometimes we wish for more. For example, he provides laudatory comments about the essay "Notes for a Philosophy of Solitude," suggesting it is one of the best pieces Merton wrote, yet Shannon declines much commentary by saying, "the best advice I can give the reader at this point is to read this essay in its entirety"(p. 160). There are generous quotations from Merton's writing throughout this study, yet the sheer amount of Merton's writing finally seems to overwhelm Shannon's attempt to tell the "Merton story." There are, perhaps, too many stories. But those books will assist readers to go back to all these books and letters. Curiously, there is little in either of these books about Merton the poet. It could be that the real mystic story is revealed there.

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THE SPIRITUAL LIFE OF CHILDREN by Robert Coles. *Harper Collins*, London, 1992, £9.99.

This is the final volume of three studies by Robert Coles, professor of psychiatry and medical humanities at Harvard University, who has worked for many years with troubled and disadvantaged children. Its companion volumes are on the moral and political life of children. Some of the source