

the monastery could use it free of charge. Just like the male monasteries, female houses received charters that exempted them from paying toll charges when transporting their goods to market. These data strongly suggest that the nuns used the same methods for raising revenue as did their male counterparts, just on a smaller scale and allowing for the requirements of enclosure.

Williams wisely refrains from trying to answer every question that his data raise, but his book will be a wonderful resource for other researchers who want to do just that. The extensive footnotes are placed at the end of the text and fill sixty pages of tiny print. The bibliography takes up another twenty pages. In addition to the helpful table of contents at the beginning of the book, there is an index of the names of the nunneries and a list of the alternate names for houses referred to in the documents by more than one name, for example by both a Latin name and a French one. Unfortunately, there is no index of persons or subjects, but perhaps the labor to construct these made such an index impractical.

In conclusion, *Early Cistercian Nuns* will be a priceless resource for anyone working on monasticism in any form, not just Cistercians and/or nuns. If the data here is not useful for a particular inquiry, Williams's method for organizing and analyzing it is certainly worth studying and possibly imitating. Perhaps the biggest criticism of the book is that the first paragraph of the chapter on "Community Size" beginning with "Economic considerations . . ." on page 118 is repeated on page 122. A trifling complaint!

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David M. Odorisio, ed., *Thomas Merton in California: The Redwoods Conferences and Letters* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical, 2024), pp. xvii + 443. \$59.95, paper, ISBN 9798400800313.

"THE FARTHER THE outward journey takes you, the deeper the inward journey must be." This quotation from Henri Nouwen hints at one of the major paradoxes of Thomas Merton's life: deep solitude nurtured by the monastic vow of stability blossoms into a universalizing faith able to

reach to the outer bounds of spiritual experience and finds the capacity to integrate all that is good into itself.

The integral nature of Merton's life attests to his unique capacity and, indeed, rapacious need to connect with others similar to, but different from himself, to achieve a greater synthesis of both ideas and lived experience—and not only for himself but also for his companion(s) in dialogue. This capacity for connection and for synthesis guided Merton's sense of responsibility for realizing the Kingdom of God on earth not only for the Christian church but for all people of faith.

The possibilities for breakthroughs in this Kingdom realization were palpable in the charged atmosphere of the late 1960s. This statement holds true for the post-conciliar church generally, but is especially evident in Merton's writings of this period. The ecumenical movement of the twentieth century, which gave rise to the official validation of inter-religious dialogue in the Roman Catholic world in the Second Vatican Council's *Nostra aetate*, opened up vast possibilities for the expansion of religious consciousness, and Merton was on the forefront of this creative interchange. His Asian journey was to throw him, finally, right into the center of this dialogue. What we experience in *Thomas Merton in California* serves, in large part, as a prelude to his trip east; we experience Merton mining these themes with his fellow monastics in his own tradition before exploring them with his foreign partners.

By collecting into one volume the various materials pertinent to Merton's California experience, David Odorisio harnesses the creative winds blowing through Merton's spirit during this inspiring time of his life, and not just through Merton's spirit, but also through the spirits of his dialogue partners at Redwoods Abbey, both the sisters and their gathered friends.

These various materials include two sets of conferences Merton shared with the community at Redwoods Abbey (May and October of 1968, respectively) and the correspondence between Merton and Mother Myriam Dardenne and other monastics, acquaintances, and friends relevant to the California experience, some of which are published here for the first time. An Appendix, "Four Days with Merton," by Gracie Jones, a fellow guest at Redwoods Abbey during Merton's first set of conferences in May of 1968, serves to offer a rare and fascinating glimpse into one

person's random and opportune time with the famous guest. Jones's essay, first published in *The Monitor*, a San Rafael, California, newspaper, attests to the sensitivity and kindness of Merton, along with his genuine interest in the realities and challenges that were most relevant to Gracie Jones, a black Roman Catholic woman seeking to carve out her rightful place in American society and American Catholicism. Jones's testimony extends Merton's teaching in the conferences and his concerns expressed in his letters into the realm of lived experience and poignantly corroborates the body of the book with a quiet, emotional concluding attestation.

A Foreword by Kathy DeVico, ocsa, current abbess of Redwoods Abbey, and a Preface by Douglas E. Christie, a monastic scholar and familiar guest and friend of Redwoods Abbey, help situate the reader to the time and place of what is to follow. We come to understand how the two Merton visits to Redwoods came to be, as well as the spiritual and intellectual context of the community Merton would address. An Introduction by David Odorisio places the California experience in the larger context of Merton's journey to the east and draws attention to the themes to be explored in the conferences and letters. Much attention is also given to Merton's personal interest in finding a location in California to set up a hermitage of some sort. Merton had been given permission by his new abbot to scope out a more remote place, away from Gethsemani, where he could relocate to find greater solitude. Odorisio's Introduction of *Thomas Merton in California* communicates quite effectively Merton's excitement about the potential prospects—and challenges—of this venture.

The May and October 1968 conferences are here transcribed with only limited breaks due to the poor quality of the recordings. Some of the conferences begin mid-conference. Odorisio's notes are helpful in navigating these disruptions, and they are never overly cumbersome. The general theme at the heart of the conferences is *the renewal of contemplative life*, mainly within the Cistercian monastic context, but the discussions always tend toward the general and universal applicability of contemplative life for those beyond the monastic enclosure.

How to deepen one's contemplative life in the modern world is the question that drives many of Merton's ideas and the questions that they provoke. Merton is insistent that the monastic of the twentieth century must engage in the consciousness of modernity, discerning what is a gift

to be integrated and what is not. The most potent components to this modern, integral consciousness that Merton mentions are elements from then-contemporary psychology, especially from Freud's *Civilization and its Discontents* and Reza Aresteh's *Final Integration in the Adult Personality*.

Ultimately, though, it is the wisdom of the religious traditions of the East that Merton wants to unpack for his audience. A modern consciousness is one that can synthesize these various truths and, through them, have one's consciousness expand into fuller wisdom. With careful discernment, nothing is a threat, and much is a gift. What Merton is aiming for in his discussions and writings on contemplative, monastic renewal is to move the monastics toward greater freedom and authenticity. A worthy companion, in this regard, to *Thomas Merton in California* would be his *Contemplation in a World of Action*.

One warning about *Thomas Merton in California* is warranted: this is niche Merton. This book will be of special interest to those who are already familiar with Merton and desire to get a closer glimpse into his final days before his untimely death on December 10, 1968, just a few months after the second conference. Odorisio, and those who share in bringing Merton's time in California to life in this volume, do a fine job in creating a memorable reading experience that at once informs and delights. Perhaps *Thomas Merton in California* is best read as a supplement not only to *Contemplation in a World of Action* but also to *The Inner Experience*, both of which are more carefully thought out and articulated treatments of similar topics and concerns.

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Mark O'Keefe and María Gonzalo-García, *To Live for God Alone: The Life and Spirit of Saint Rafael Arnaiz*, MW 68 (Collegetown, MN: Cistercian, 2023), pp. xv + 271, paper, \$37.15, ISBN 978-0-87907-291-9.

God alone . . . God alone . . . God alone. That is my theme . . . that is my only thought.

—Rafael Arnaiz, December 16, 1937

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