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## Review: 'Thomas Merton And the Monastic Vision'

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of work published since then, including extensive notes. As the preface demonstrates, the essays in this volume provided a critical base for this newer scholarship. They address topics ranging from slaveholding Jesuits in Maryland to a fine overview of religious women in the South to Catholic elites to Irish and Creole Catholics.

American Catholicism was born in the South, and the majority of Catholics lived in slave states until well into the nineteenth century. Southern Catholics have yet to gain the rich body of scholarship they deserve, largely because Southern historians remain unconcerned with non-Protestants, immigrants, and urban dwellers, and historians of Catholicism have been unconcerned with the South. There are signs that this is changing. The institutional approach that has dominated Catholic history is now giving way to social and cultural histories that take topics such as race, region, ethnicity, class, and gender into account.

As the preface suggests, the prevailing approach to Catholics in the Old South remains the question of whether, when, or how they "became Southern." For the subject to gain the rich body of scholarship it deserves, this old question of assimilation will need to be set aside in favor of a broader and more sophisticated approach. Nevertheless, this solid collection remains the essential starting point for research in the field.

**Beth Barton Schweiger**  
University of Arkansas

***Thomas Merton & the Monastic Vision.*** By Lawrence S. Cunningham. Library of Religious Biography. Edited by Mark A. Noll, Nathan O. Hatch, and Allen C. Guelzo. Grand Rapids, Mich.: William B. Eerdmans, 1999. xii + 228 pp. \$16.00 paper.

Lawrence Cunningham refracts the complexities of Thomas Merton through the prism of his monastic vocation. From that unity of perspective, Cunningham successfully displays the wide spectrum of Merton's diverse interests, commitments, and passions. A volume in Eerdmans' Library of Religious Biography, this engagingly written work succumbs neither to hagiography nor to exposé, both of which are tempting with a figure as revered as Thomas Merton. Seven chapters, organized chronologically, examine Merton's life from his birth to his death. The eighth chapter, "Some Biographical Notes," partially rectifies the absence of footnotes.

In telling the story, Cunningham never wavers from his "deep personal conviction . . . that if one does not understand Merton as a monk, one does not understand Merton at all" (16-17). Where this biography excels is in detailing Merton's monastic vision to provide a depth of understanding concerning his extraordinary list of publications. All were produced in and around the strict monastic schedule by a man who rarely left monastic enclosure. Merton's "apostolate of friendship" (70), expressed through extensive correspondence and eclectic reading, partially explains the monk's uncanny ability to engage his contemporaries through his writings. Throughout his account, Cunningham offers balanced commentary on Merton's many gifts and their limitations and how his writings give a permanent record of both.

This biography is commended to Merton *aficionados* as well as his more skeptical critics. Written in an engaging and lucid style, the book is appropriate for upper division undergraduate or master's level courses. College and university libraries should include it in their collections.

**Sandra Yocum Mize**  
University of Dayton

*A World History of Christianity*. Edited by **Adrian Hastings**. Grand Rapids, Mich.: William B. Eerdmans, 1999. xiv + 594 pp. \$45.00 cloth.

This volume is a unique and on the whole very successful attempt to present a non-Eurocentric history of the world Christian movement. Originally the brainchild of the late Peter Hinchliff of Oxford, the project was brought to completion by Adrian Hastings. An international team of authors covers the realm of world Christian history in thirteen separate chapters, for which each author was given considerable latitude of structure and approach. Seven chapters treat the Western church, but not in a continuum. In the order in which the Christian movement entered non-Western areas in time, chapters appear on each area. For example, chapters 5 and 6 are Robert Frykenberg's masterful essay on India and Kevin Ward's fine piece on Africa, respectively. And R. G. Tiedemann's portrait of Christianity in East Asia since about 1500 comes before the chapters on North America (that happily recognizes Canada as well) and recent Western Europe.

The result, despite variations in individual authors' styles and approaches, is the most effective portrait of world Christian history of which I know. It goes far towards portraying the reality of (in the words of editor Hastings) the "chameleon"-like nature of the historical transmission of Christianity across cultural boundaries, and its present status as the most global of the world religions. The volume contains extensive and up-to-date bibliographies for each topic, ten maps, and a full index of places and proper names. It would serve admirably as a classroom text.

**Daniel H. Bays**  
Calvin College