

**T**

his year marks the nine-hundredth anniversary of the Cistercian order. As part of the celebration, Cistercian Publications, conspicuous for making available monastic sources and studies for well over a generation, has published James France's handsome and lavishly illustrated volume. This essay on the medieval Cistercians and art features chapters that not only explicate the illustrations but give, in a quite readable fashion, the history of the order. Founded as an attempt to observe the Rule of Benedict in its primitive vigor, the order grew until houses of men and women dotted the medieval map from Eastern Europe to Portugal, from Italy to England, Ireland, and Scandinavia. It is a mark of the vigor of the Cistercian monastic tradition that during Saint Bernard of Clairvaux's (1090-1153) lifetime, his monastery at Clairvaux founded sixty-eight daughter houses.

**The Cistercians in Medieval Art**  
by James France  
*Cistercian Publications, \$50, 278 pp.*

France examines the salient features of monastic life (with separate chapters on the abbot, the monastic community, the development of lay brothers, and the communities of women), and ends with four chapters which explicate the liturgy, manual labor, sacred reading, and what the author calls "Edification,

**RELIGION  
BOOKNOTES**



**Lawrence S. Cunningham**

Entertainment, and Exposure." Nearly two hundred black-and-white illustrations, twenty-six color plates, a glossary of monastic terms, a good bibliography, and an index (alas, restricted to names and places) are included. The final illustration is a photograph of a monk in the cloister of a Cistercian monastery near Dubuque, Iowa (New Melleray), suggesting the vigor of this form of monastic witness.

This book is a good "browse," a good "read," and a source of much useful, and sometimes odd, information. With the aid of the text we can soon distinguish choir monks from lay brothers, learn that the Cistercian custom of not wearing underclothes beneath the habit triggered much adolescent humor in the Middle Ages, and how long it took a reasonably accomplished copyist to make a full Bible (roughly two-and-a-half years doing six pages a day). Most of all, we get a fine account of one of the most important religious orders in the history of the Western church, as well as a lesson in how a historian can uti-

lize the iconic record to illumine history without doing violence to the work of art. *The Cistercians in Medieval Art* would make a fine addition to any school library and a perfect gift for those, like myself, who love things monastic.

William Schickel is a distinguished architect, sculptor, painter, and designer who comes from a family of artists. His grandfather was the architect re-

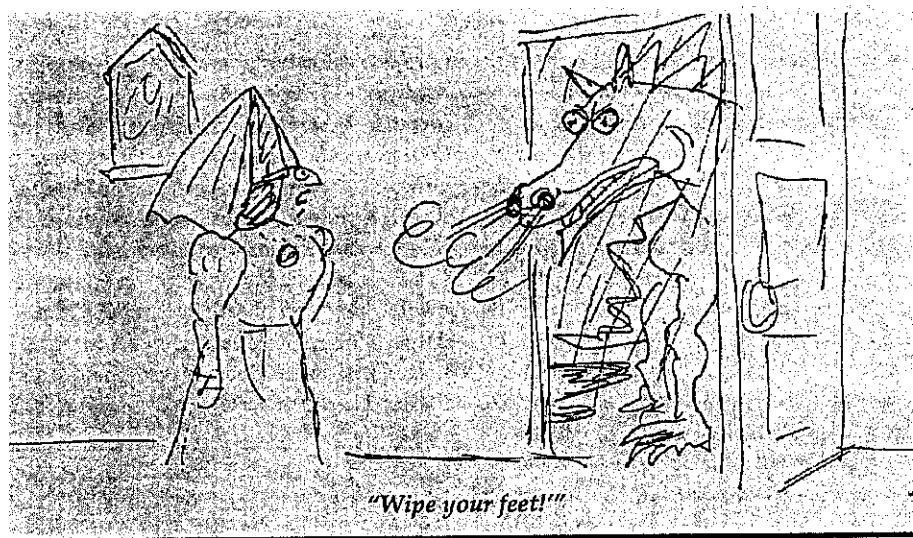
**The Art of William Schickel**  
by Gregory Wolfe

*University of Notre Dame Press, \$45, 161 pp.*

sponsible for many buildings in New York City, including the church of Saint Ignatius Loyola on Park Avenue. Schickel himself went to Notre Dame in the 1940s and fell under the influence of the "Catholic Revival" that imbued him with a life-long passion for the ideas of Jacques Maritain on the relationship among art, life, and religious truth. He has made his home in Loveland, Ohio, where, over a span of nearly fifty years, he has produced a stream of religious and liturgical art as well as designs for a number of striking churches, chapels, and public buildings.

Loveland, of course, is the home of the Grail—the lay movement of women who encouraged the young Schickel to work in their art program and gave him his first important church design opportunity: to turn an old hay barn into a chapel. He did so in a stunning fashion. Schickel also did the renovation of the abbey church of Our Lady of Gethsemani in Kentucky, and, in the bargain, designed the furnishings (made by the monks) in a style appropriate for the austere aesthetics of the Cistercian tradition.

Those buildings, as well as shrines, the church of a Benedictine priory, private homes, the beautiful "roofless church" in New Harmony, Indiana, and even the design for a minimum-security reformatory, are all lushly illustrated in this book. Handsomely produced, the book features a useful essay by Gregory Wolfe. My only criticism is that many of the illustrations lack information concerning the objects' actual dimensions



(how large are the photographic illustrations of famous prisoners depicted on the wall of the reformatory?) and, frequently, dates of completion.

Schickel represents a strain of religious art that reflects the thought of a certain strand of scholasticism as well as a "modernist" conviction whose other practitioners would include such artists as Eric Gill, Georges Roualt, and Marc Chagall. He is a powerful artist whose work I admire enormously.

Belden Lane's deeply contemplative book features three interwoven strands which, though discrete, reflect a com-

---

**The Solace of Fierce Landscapes:  
Exploring Desert and Mountain  
Spirituality**

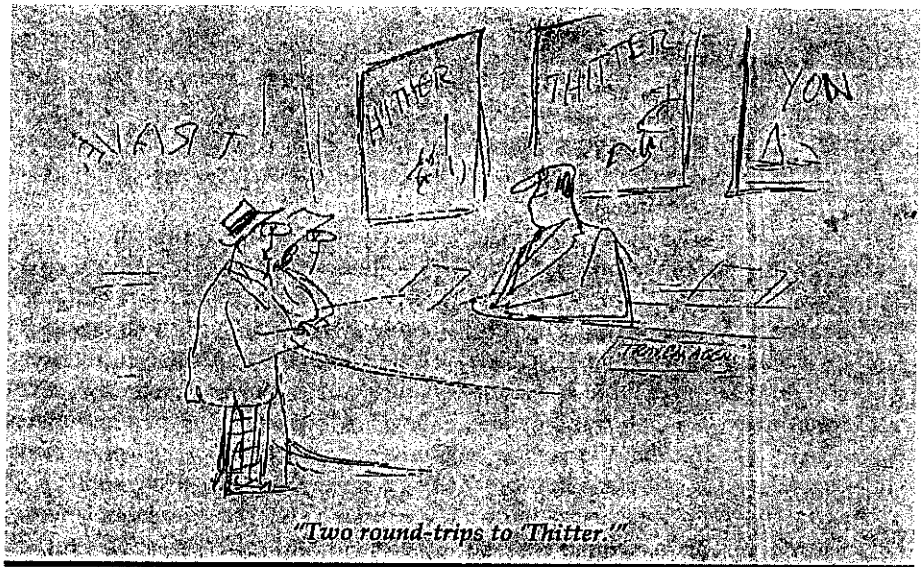
by Belden C. Lane

Oxford University Press, \$25, 282 pp.

---

mon urgency. Lane, a Presbyterian pastor and academic who teaches at Saint Louis University, is a hiker, climber, and camper. He has a deep love for those two primordial loci of the biblical spiritual experience: the desert and the mountain, and he chronicles his visits to such places not as a tourist but as a spiritual seeker. His journeys, to the deserts of New Mexico and the Sinai, to mountains like Tabor and Sinai, are set against the drama of his mother's death. In her final days she is befuddled by physical pain and the onset of Alzheimer's disease. Against this interplay of movement and stasis he sketches out, but not systematically, that strand of theology which is called mystical, negative, "imageless," or *apophatic*.

Lane is too sophisticated a theologian to argue that a person lives exclusively in the realm of the negative search for God. All of the great theologians, from Gregory of Nyssa through the Pseudo Dionysius to the great Carmelites like Teresa of Avila and John of the Cross, hold the way of negation in tension with the way of light; the way of image and symbol with the way of the aniconic; the way of darkness with the way of illumination. Hence, in some very fine pages, Lane holds in tandem Mount Tabor, where Jesus is transfigured, and



"Two round-trips to Thither."

Mount Sinai, where Moses enters into the cloud to meet God. It is to Lane's credit that he never reduces the apophatic tradition in Christianity to some kind of Plotinian abstractionism.

I would praise Lane's book for some precise merits. First, he writes of spirituality from within the Christian tradition and free of new-ageish fluff. Second, he is not afraid to intersperse his study with personal experience. For that reason, what he has to say cuts close to the bone. This is not a bloodless academic treatise. Finally, he has read widely and uses his reading to good purpose. I did find this book a bit prolix. Some of the chapters have been previously published and perhaps as a consequence there is some repetition. That minor caveat aside, one must praise Lane for an intelligent and deeply felt work. Toward the end of his book, he writes that "fierce landscapes" offer a strange solace yet "they require...a discipline (or *habitus*) capable of disclosing meaning." Lane, it seems to me, has that discipline.

Since 1985, Saint Mary's College in Notre Dame, Indiana, has sponsored an

---

**The Quotidian Mysteries**

by Kathleen Norris

Paulist, \$5.95, 89 pp.

---

annual lecture to honor the memory of scholar and poet Sister Madeleva Wolff, the former president of that school.

Monika Hellwig was the first lecturer, and a distinguished roster of American women have followed her to the podium to reflect on women and various aspects of religious belief and practice. The 1998 lecturer, Kathleen Norris, as best I can determine, is the first Protestant to be so honored.

Norris, of course, has gained national fame as an articulate writer on Christian spirituality. She has an excellent reputation as a poet and critic as well. Her Madeleva lecture, as the title indicates, is concerned with how the quotidian can be an opportunity for the cultivation of God's presence in the world. Daily drudgery is not sanctifying as such, but to neglect its essential place in our lives is to miss a rich resource for the development of a healthy Christian life. Norris, in short, provides a contemporary account of ordinary spirituality which has behind it a tradition with deep roots in the history of Christian asceticism. Norris makes the important point that Incarnation, after all, is concerned with our bodies and their needs.

I heard the shortened version of this lecture delivered to a near standing-room-only audience. Its compelling message is distilled from a blend of personal autobiographical musings and wry humor, and deepened by a long engagement with monastic values. From her long-standing relationship to the Benedictines as an oblate, Norris has learned, as she puts it elegantly in this