

herself generously suggests Pauline Matarasso's *The Cistercian World: Monastic Writings in the Twelfth Century* for those who want to drink deeper at the Cistercian well.
Michael Woodward

Running to the Mountain: A Journey of Faith and Change. by Jon Katz. pp. 242, New York: Villard, 1999. ISBN: 0679456783. \$19.99.

Jon Katz has written a number of novels, two nonfiction books and a variety of articles for a wide range of magazines and websites. *Running to the Mountain* though is in stark contrast to his previous work. In this book Katz recounts a quasi-spiritual journey he undertook in recent years in which he bought an isolated "cottage" in a remote area of upstate New York and spent the better part of the summer there in solitude, breaking with his everyday settled life where he felt that if he settled any further he would "vanish into the mud like some fat old catfish." (xviii.) Approaching his fiftieth birthday he wished to oil the hinges of change and explore where his life might go as his daughter prepared to leave home for college and after twenty-five years of marriage. This is a book about change, about the authors mid-life change and about new discoveries and growth.

From a Jewish background Katz admits he is not a religious man and yet he is strongly attracted to the writings of Thomas Merton. As a student he wrote to Merton after having read *The Seven Storey Mountain* and his attraction to Merton's life and work continued until he moved to a temporary "hermitage" of his own taking with him Merton's journals, along with other books by and about him. Like Merton in his journals Katz was obsessed with trying to discover how to live and, more importantly, how to live in the modern world where change and development have mushroomed in the years since Merton's death.

Katz asks some searching questions about what spirituality is, where it can be found and how it connects with everyday life. He debates with Merton, questions him, disagrees with him and ultimately finds realistic answers to his questions. At times Katz experience of loneliness and solitude almost parallels Merton's experience, attempting to remove himself from life on the one hand whilst on the other feverishly trying to stay involved. He also found his days echoed Merton's including "contemplation, simplicity, solitude, and plenty of hard work" along with lessons in humility as Katz, impractical, bookish and a through and through city dweller, came to terms with his new environment.

Unlike Merton, Katz is right up-to-date with new technology, current affairs and the latest films. Having worked for CBS, had moderate success as a writer and been involved with writing for the internet he is no technophobe. As Merton joked of taking asbestos paper with him to continue writing in purgatory Katz muses about being discovered dead slumped over his computer keyboard. Like Merton though, Katz questions the place of technology and, in a chapter entitled "Primestar and Frankenstein," having had

a satellite dish erected at his mountain retreat he tackles questions relating to technology and whether the human mind can "master what the human mind has made?" (167.) He concludes affirmatively saying:

I can go on-line and still read *The Seven Storey Mountain*.
My daughter can watch *Seinfeld* and still be a moral being
prepared for the world.
I can walk in the woods but also drive to the movies.
I can go to a mountaintop and there, after long summer
days of simplicity and thoughtfulness, click on Primestar.
(169.)

Running to the Mountain contains a number of factual errors about Merton and there were a number of times when I felt Katz's interpretation and understanding of Merton was coloured to a great extent by his reliance on Monica Furlong's biography of Merton. There were times when Katz did not seem to understand the meaning of monastic life, the freely taken vows or the monk's relationship to his abbot even describing Dom James Fox in Furlongesque terms as Merton's "chief tormentor." 177. Katz also suggests that "the real tragedy of Thomas Merton...was that he made spirituality seem inaccessible even while exploring it so ceaselessly and courageously himself" (194.) a view Merton's continuing popularity would belie.

These reservations aside I think that many readers of *The Merton Journal* will appreciate Katz's account of his journey accompanied by Merton. I am sure it will parallel their own experience of reading Merton and walking with him on their journey through life. It is a well written book, stimulating, challenging and very human. As Katz undergoes his journey the questions he asks are all related to his everyday experience and ultimately it is to this experience that he returns, the reality of his family, urban life in New Jersey and to earning a living. His time in solitude serves him as a secular retreat from where he can take stock and return refreshed and invigorated to his everyday life.
Paul M Pearson.

Our Reviewers

Paul M. Pearson is Secretary of the Thomas Merton Society of GB & I. He is regular contributor to both the *Merton Journal* and *Merton Seasonal*.

Tony Pannett is a priest and TMS member. He was one of the retreat leaders at the Buddhist/Christian Retreat at Sayers Common in 1997.

Michael Woodward is a poet and publisher. *Thomas Merton, Poet, Monk, Prophet*, the 1998 Conference Papers of the TMS, was published under his imprint, Three Peaks Press, last December.