

BOOKS ABOUT MERTON
A list compiled by Ian Thomson

A major problem for anyone wanting to read about Thomas Merton is the sheer number of books about him. At present there are almost thirty books on Merton and aspects of his life available from bookshops in Britain and Ireland. The selection that follows may help readers find those books that interest them most. First come biographies and recollections of Merton by friends and colleagues ...

Jim Forest: Living with Wisdom, Orbis (US), 1991, £8.95: Sympathetic, readable and illustrated with a wealth of photographs, this is the most approachable introduction to Thomas Merton for the general reader. Written by a close friend of Merton, *Living with Wisdom* is a convincing and lovable portrait of the monk who was to play such a vital and important spiritual role in the world he once rejected.

Michael Mott: The Seven Mountains of Thomas Merton, Sheldon, 1986, £22.50: The official Merton biography. Drawing on unpublished private journals and papers, Michael Mott demonstrates the breadth of Merton's interests and complexity of his character. His account of monastery life gives us a clear idea of the world that surrounded the inner conflicts and achievements of this monk of genius. Comprehensive and informative, this book is a major achievement in the field of Merton studies.

William H. Shannon: Silent Lamp - The Thomas Merton Story, SCM, 1993, £10.95: A reflective biography which illuminates Merton's inner life while chronicling his outer journey in terms of the events and experiences that shaped his spiritual path. Written by the General Editor of the Merton Letters and first president of the ITMS, the book is recommended to those who already know something of Thomas Merton and seek an in-depth analysis and evaluation of the monk from Gethsemani and his contribution to our age.

Monica Furlong: Merton - A Biography, Collins, 1980, Out of Print: This biography introduced a generation of readers to Merton. Out of print, it is still available from public libraries. As a personal view of Merton and his life, it is both enjoyable and informative. Monica Furlong is a perceptive writer and many of her insights are valid and helpful. However, her book does need to be read alongside later works which have gained from access to a wider range of primary sources.

The Message of Thomas Merton, ed. Bro. Patrick Hart Cistercian publications (US), 1981, £15.99: The Message of Thomas Merton

contains twelve essays by people who knew Thomas Merton personally. Each offers a unique insight into a particular aspect of Merton's life and work ... his gift for friendship, his concern for the monastic life, solitude and prayer, his literary gifts, his lively interest in ecumenism and his attraction to the East. A feast of Merton.

M. Basil Pennington: Thomas Merton, Brother Monk - The Quest for True Freedom, Harper & Row (US), 1990, £5.50: An intimate portrayal of Merton's monastic life and spiritual quest by a fellow Cistercian and writer. The book is particularly interesting for the insight that it offers from the standpoint of a brother monk. In assembling yet more pieces of the Merton mosaic, Basil Pennington offers a valuable supplement to more formal biographies of this many-sided man.

M. Basil Pennington: A Retreat with Thomas Merton, Element, 1991, £6.99, ISBN: 1 852 30252 6: Basil Pennington spent a week on retreat in Merton's hermitage at Gethsemani while preparing his book, *Thomas Merton - Brother Monk* (see above). This is his journal of that retreat with Merton himself acting as retreat master through audio tapes, the surroundings and the atmosphere. Photographs by Pennington and Merton establish a sense of place and of solitude.

P. Hart: Thomas Merton, Monk: A Monastic Tribute, Hodder & Stoughton, 1975; Revised Edition, Cistercian Publications, 1983, \$7.95: A collection of articles about Thomas Merton by monks and nuns who knew him personally. Contributors include monks from Gethsemani as well as personal friends and colleagues. Each covers a particular aspect of Merton's life and work ... as monk, solitary, spiritual writer, poet, social critic, ecumenist and Zen master. Available in some public libraries this anthology can also be ordered direct from the USA.

The next group of books focus on Merton's spiritual life and development and matters of particular concern to him

William H. Shannon: Thomas Merton's Dark Path, Farrer Straus & Giroux, 1988, £5.95: Firmly placing Merton within the apophatic tradition of mysticism, the 'dark way' of Gregory of Nyssa, Pseudo-Dionysius and St. John of the Cross, Shannon traces the development of Merton's thought on contemplation. His centre-piece is a selection of passages from *The Inner Experience*, a manuscript which Merton decided should never be published as a book. Perceptive and enlightening, *Dark Path* is required reading for anyone studying Merton's spiritual growth and development.

James Finley: Merton's Palace of Nowhere, Ave Maria Press, 1978, £4.95: At one time a novice of Merton's at Gethsemani, James Finley

explores Merton's quest for spiritual identity and provides a new and stimulating look at his approach to prayer and contemplation. In exploring Merton's thought, Finley not only offers fresh insight into his spirituality, but invaluable guidance for each of us on our own inner journey.

Anne E. Carr: Search for Wisdom and Spirit/Thomas Merton's Theology of the Self, Univ. of Notre Dame Press, 1988, £15.55: Anne Carr focuses on Merton's search for the meaning of the true Self in relation to the quest for union with God. With Merton's writings placed in their biographical context, she reveals that he was much more consistent in his approach than many have realised. An in-depth study for those particularly interested in the spiritual aspects of the life of the monk from Kentucky.

Cashen: Solitude in the Thought of Thomas Merton, Cistercian Publications, £9.99, 1982: Cashen's sensitive and perceptive study of Merton's ever-growing need for greater solitude is placed squarely within the context of his monastic commitment. Based on a doctoral dissertation at Rome's Georgian University, it should be of special interest to all who experience a need for greater solitude in their lives.

David Cooper: Thomas Merton's Art of Denial: The Evolution of a Radical Humanist: Univ. of Georgina Press, 1989, £27.95: Drawing on personal letters, unpublished works and other studies, Cooper offers a portrait of a man battling his imperfections and torn between the influence of the 20th Century and the serenity of the religious ideal. A valuable addition to Merton scholarship, it is perhaps best read in conjunction with other biographical; and literary studies.

Thomas King, SJ: Way of the Christian Mystic: Merton, Mystic at the Centre of America, Liturgical Press, 1992, £10.99: A difficulty for newcomers to Merton is the paradox that seemed to permeate his life. Thomas King examines the themes of Self, Contemplation, Freedom and The Other in Merton's work, and reveals the essential unity that underlies much of the apparent inconsistency in his life and thought. Particularly helpful if read before tackling some of Merton's own work. But why limit him to America?

Henri Nouwen: Pray to Live: Thomas Merton, Contemplative Critic, Triumph Books, New Jersey (US), 1991, £5.95: In this introduction to the essential Thomas Merton, Henri Nouwen uncovers the main trends in Merton's life and his preoccupations over the years. Establishing a proper perspective for serious study of the man and his work, he shows how Merton's social comment and criticism stemmed directly from his life of prayer and religious commitment.

Robert J. Waldron: Thomas Merton in Search of his Soul - A Jungian Perspective, Ave Maria Press, 1994, £5.95: A fairly short

and very readable examination of Thomas Merton's life from the perspective of Jungian psychology. In looking at Merton's journey Waldron provides a mirror to help the reader look at their own journey.

The third group of books examine Merton's work as a creative artist ...

Victor Kramer: Thomas Merton, Monk and Artist, Cistercian Publications, 1988, £5.99: Kramer provides a comprehensive overview of Merton's life as monk and writer and shows how his literary talents were used in his monastic journey. He reflects on Merton's most important works and comments on them individually and as a whole. A useful addendum is his critical review of books published about Merton.

G. Woodcock: Thomas Merton, Monk and Poet, Canongate, 1978: This is a first rate study of Merton's creative output, placing his work as poet within the context of his monastic vocation. Woodcock handles his subject with great sensitivity and insight, and his interpretation of Merton's poetry is both positive and critical in the best sense of the word. Sadly out of print, the book can still be obtained through public libraries.

Finally, writers who use Merton's writings as a guide for the interior spiritual journey ...

Albert Haase OFM: Swimming in the Sun - Discovering the Lord's Prayer with Francis of Assisi and Thomas Merton. St. Anthony Messenger Press, 1993, £7.95: In The Sign of Jonas, Merton said that saying the Our Father is "like swimming in the sun." Through the writings of Francis of Assisi and Thomas Merton, the author examines the central themes of the Our Father leading him to look at the major components that make up the spiritual life.

ed. A. Taylor: Shining Wilderness (Daily Readings from Thomas Merton), Darton Longman Todd, 1988, £2.75: One of the pocket-sized Modern Spirituality Series, Shining Wilderness is a collection of daily reading selected from Merton's work. Monica Furlong's brief introduction is informative and highly readable. Fitting neatly in the pocket or on a bedside table, the book is an ideal companion for those who have met Thomas Merton and for those reading him for the very first time.

Esther de Waal: Seven Day Journey with Thomas Merton, Eagle, 1993, £8.99: Ester de Waal will be known to many readers for her talk and meditation at the Winchester Conference. In this beautifully designed book, she takes us on a seven day retreat with Merton, meditating on some of the finest of his contemplative writing and magnificent photographs taken by Merton himself. As one reviewer commented, the perfect companion for a

solitary retreat.

Melvyn Matthews: The Hidden Journey - Reflections on a Dream by Thomas Merton, Collins Fount, 1989, £3.50: Thomas Merton has long been a key figure in the life and thought of the Anglican priest and writer, Melvyn Matthews. In the Hidden Journey, the author reflects on themes suggested by a dream recounted by Merton in Conjectures of a Guilty Bystander. As Matthews reveals, The Hidden Journey, the journey within, is the journey towards Christ and a true understanding of ourselves.

