



Woodcut by Lavrans Nielsen from *THE MONASTIC JOURNEY*

THOMAS MERTON'S MONASTIC JOURNEY

Brother Patrick Hart, O.C.S.O., onetime secretary to Thomas Merton, has collected and edited a series of Merton's essays on the monastic life, many of which were out of print, difficult to obtain, or unpublished. The volume, titled THE MONASTIC JOURNEY, was published in Great Britain by Sheldon Press in the spring of 1977 and is being issued by Sheed, Andrews and McMeel in the United States this fall. The following section, taken from the foreword by Brother Patrick, gives something of the reasons for publication and describes the contents of the 184 page volume. The first three essays, not mentioned by Brother Patrick by title, are "What is the Monastic Life?," "Basic Principles of Monastic Spirituality," and "Monastic Peace."

The articles selected and edited for this volume were written during the last decade of Merton's life, and hence reflect his mature thought on both community monastic living and the solitary life, which was a lifelong preoccupation. The first three essays attempt to describe something of the mystery of the monastic vocation, and were published originally in pamphlet form by the Abbey of Gethsemani. Together they form a strong statement on the basic verities of the monastic way of life.

The remainder of the volume is composed of articles written for monastic journals on various themes proper to the monastic journey, such as 'The Humanity of Christ in Monastic Prayer', 'Conversion of Life', 'Monastic Attitudes: A Matter of Choice' and 'Wilderness and Paradise: Two Studies.'

Several hitherto unpublished works are also included in this volume: 'Monastic Renewal: A Memorandum' and 'Project for a Hermitage'. Another manuscript on 'The Solitary Life', printed by Victor and Carolyn Hammer of Lexington, Kentucky, 'pro manuscripto' on their hand press in an elegant but limited edition, is no longer in print. This deeply moving monograph in praise of the hermit life fittingly brings the volume to a close. It expresses eloquently Merton's view of the monastery as having its windows opened out onto the desert.

Finally, three appendixes are added: in addition to the unpublished memorandum on monastic renewal referred to above, there is a letter Merton penned to the Abbot of the Cistercian monastery of Frattocchie near Rome in response to Pope Paul's personal request for a 'Message of Contemplatives to the Modern World'. The third appendix, 'Contemplatives and the Crisis of Faith', constitutes the final message which was eventually promulgated at the Synod of Bishops which met in Rome during October of 1967.