

A BELGIAN MERTON SYMPOSIUM

“God geeft de mensen een mens”

26 - 27 October 1985

St. Andriesabdij

Bruges, Belgium

—A Report by **Constant Broos**

Last October a “Merton Symposium” was held in Belgium at the Abbey of St. Andre. Three papers or lectures were presented to the participants, i.e.:

1. Edward Buysse. “Thomas Merton: een man van en voor onze tijd.”
2. Charles Dumont, O.C.S.O. “Thomas Merton: een contemplatief midden in de wereld.”
3. Roger Roels. “Thomas Merton: een stille profeet van authenticiteit.”

These papers have been collected into a 58-page booklet (in Dutch) with an introduction by Constant Broos and an introductory letter of greeting to the participants by Brother Partick Hart. The booklet is titled *Teksten van het Thomas Merton-Weekend* and is on file in the Thomas Merton Studies Center.

Constant Broos, long interested in Thomas Merton, helped to coordinate the Symposium and was, with his wife, one of the participants. He has written a short report on the Symposium which we reproduce here.

On the 26th and 27th of October 1985 a weekend of spiritual recollection took place at Brugge [Bruges] in the Abbey of St. Andre (Belgium), during which thirty-five lay people met to exchange ideas and read texts of Thomas Merton and attend three lectures about his life and spirituality.

All those people came spontaneously, they had heard and read an announcement on this meeting. Each one had read some of Merton's books and had found inspiration for their own spiritual life in one or another of his many different writings. They all wanted to speak and hear about him. Various texts were commented upon by those who attended.

Mr. Roger Roels calls himself a spiritual son of Merton. He gave a personal witnessing about his spiritual father. He tried to say that every man or woman is able to share the same experiences provided he or she reads attentively what Merton has written.

Mr. Edward Buysse described the evolution which can be observed in the spirituality of Thomas Merton. From a radical flight from the world he became more and more open to people with their needs and sufferings. He also pointed out the mystical dimension of Merton's faith in Christ.

Father Charles Dumont, a Trappist like Merton, gave a remarkable talk on his confrere. But he did not say new things, he managed only to prove that Merton had already said everything himself in his writings.* He gave a deep appreciation on the way Merton had answered the call of God and lived his vocation up to the end of his life.

Father Dumont, who met Father Louis personally and with whom he corresponded for several years, gave an inspiring outline of his deep spiritual life, which is in fact the only *fil conducteur* to be found in his works.

Many of the participants expressed the wish that this first experience could be repeated.



CONSTANT BROOS

Constant Broos, a resident of Rijmenam, Belgium, wrote the following account of himself in a letter to Robert E. Daggy: "I will tell you briefly my story. I am 50 years old and during my youth I have read some books of Thomas Merton and I have reread them. They fascinated me. I studied history and philosophy at the University of Leuven and became a teacher at a high school. In 1980 I became blind and was operated at my right eye during the summer of 1983. I can see now and being an invalid and unable to do my job I have a lot of time to read and study. I am now studying on the life and works of Thomas Merton. Due to the Trappist Abbey of Westmalle I acquired some works, but what is available there is insufficient. So, I am searching further."

*EDITOR'S NOTE. Mr. Broos is here, no doubt, commenting on the fact that Father Dumont's lecture was based on a previously published essay. SEE "A contemplative at the heart of the world," *Lumen Vitae* [English ed.] 24 (December 1969): pp. 634-646; "Un contemplatif au cœur du monde," *Lumen Vitae* [French ed.] 24 (December 1969): pp. 466-478; and "The contemplative" in *Thomas Merton / Monk: a Monastic Tribute*; ed. Brother Patrick Hart (1974): pp. 125-140.