

MERTON'S FORESIGHT

Review of

Ronald E. Powaski
THOMAS MERTON ON NUCLEAR WEAPONS
 Chicago: Loyola University Press, 1988
 169 p. \$7.95 [paperback]

Reviewed by **Robert Grip**

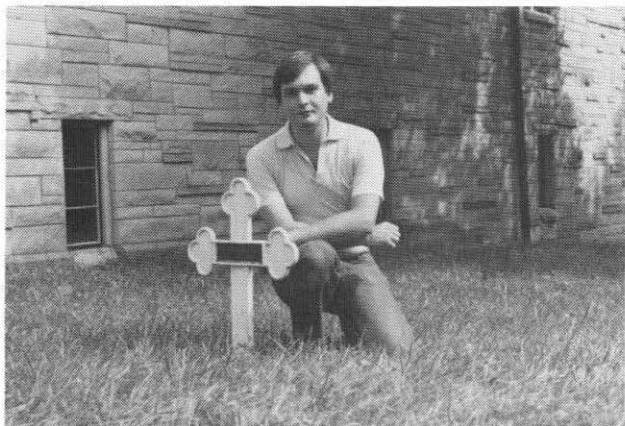
The publication of *Thomas Merton on Nuclear Weapons* could not have come at a better time. It will go on sale as the world's two superpowers prepare to eliminate an entire class of nuclear missiles, and as American Catholic bishops address the issue of the arms race.

Paying an unspoken tribute to the monk who, more than twenty-five years ago, condemned the stockpiling of nuclear weapons, Church leaders are now calling for ratification of the Intermediate-range Nuclear Forces (INF) treaty with the Soviet Union. Archbishop Roger Mahony of Los Angeles, chairman of the U. S. Catholic Conference's Committee on International Policy told the Senate Foreign Relations Committee on 22 February 1988: "We [bishops] . . . recognize that no question of foreign affairs surpasses the nuclear-arms race in terms of moral content and importance."

In his tribute to Merton's foresight, Ronald Powaski begins his work with "The Church on War and Peace," a look at the early views on the incompatibility of war and Christian life, Augustine's "Just War" theory and Merton's critical assessment of it.

Chapter 2, "The Morality of the Nuclear Arms Race," explores the strategies of nuclear deterrence, limited nuclear war, and Merton's harsh condemnation of them. His words are just as appropriate today as they were twenty-six years ago when Merton wrote *Peace in the Post-Christian Era*, the controversial book which was not

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ROBERT GRIP

At Merton's Grave, Gethsemani

published as a book but which Merton distributed in mimeograph and from which he gleaned material for several articles. He said:

To allow governments to pour more and more billions into weapons that almost immediately become obsolete . . . is one of the most colossal injustices in the long history of man. While we are doing this, two-thirds of the world are starving, or living in conditions of unparalleled and subhuman destitution.

Chapter 3, "The Causes of the Nuclear Arms Race," illustrates Merton's ability to slice through political rhetoric, and see ideology, nationalism and fear as some of the underlying reasons for the nuclear arms race. Having detailed the problem and its causes, Powaski turns toward solutions in the final three chapters, "The Christian Responsibility," "Nonviolent Action," and "Contemplation and Action." The author also allows us to see Merton's attitude on personal accountability developing; the need for all of us, in a Zen-like way, to see clearly, and free ourselves from prejudice.

Drawing on more than twenty of Merton's manuscripts and other writings, Powaski successfully distills into this single volume Merton's opinions on nuclear war and the Christian duty to promote harmony and peace. *Thomas Merton on Nuclear Weapons* will interest those concerned about the arms race who may be unfamiliar with Merton's writings on the subject, and those Merton readers who may not be able to pursue the research Powaski presents in so concise a form.

A HERMITAGE EXPERIENCE

Review of

M. Basil Pennington, O.C.S.O.
A RETREAT WITH THOMAS MERTON
 Warwick, New York: Amity House, 1988
 114 p. \$8.95 [paperback]

Reviewed by **Rob Stone**

Not surprisingly, some people who write about Thomas Merton end up spending time in his hermitage, and write about their own experience. For instance, John Howard Griffin, Merton's first "official biographer," kept a diary while living there intermittently between 1969 and 1972. Griffin's diary was subsequently published after his death as *The Hermitage Journals: A*

□ **Rob Stone** lives in Ann Arbor, Michigan, where he is a Bible and book buyer for a wholesale distribution company and a free-lance writer. His writings include "Introduction" in Merton's *Opening the Bible* (Collegeville, Minnesota: Liturgical Press, 1986) and "A Healthy Legacy," *Merton Seasonal* 11:4 (Autumn 1986).