

A TRIBUTE TO THOMAS MERTON

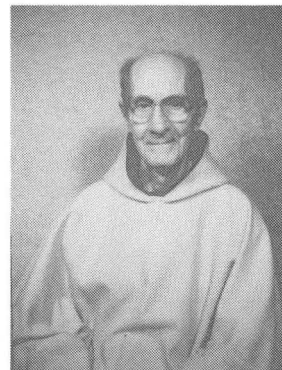
by **Edmund Brand**, O.C.S.O.

The Seven Storey Mountain
 Catapulted him to fame,
 And inspired many people
 To embrace the faith or focus
 On a deeper life of prayer.
 Sensitive, gifted, a holy man,
 He longed to be alone with God
 To ponder on The Wisdom
 Of the Fathers of the Desert.
 This prayerful, meditative monk
 Gave birth to Thoughts in Solitude.

Entering Gethsemani at
 The age of twenty-seven,
 He spent his next and final
 Twenty-seven years at work,
 Praying, writing, serving God
 And his community. At length
 He built a rustic hermitage
 Where he could live apart,
 To gain his true identity,
 God's image deep within his heart.

He loved the woods, the streams, the birds;
 The seasons were his liturgy,
 All nature sacramentals.
 Intoxicated by The Waters of Siloe,
 In a Climate of Monastic Prayer,
 He planted fruits of fervor with
 New Seeds of Contemplation.
 The Psalms of David nourished him
 Food for the hungry soul,
 His Bread in the Wilderness.

□ **Edmund Brand**, O.C.S.O., is a monk of the Monastery of the Holy Spirit at Conyers, Georgia. Born in Michigan, he entered Holy Spirit in 1946 after serving in World War II. He was solemnly professed in 1951 and ordained priest in 1954. He has held the positions of master of professed brothers, prior, juniorate master, novice master, guest master, and secretary. An interview with him is included in Dewey and Victor Kramer's *Oral History of the Abbey of Our Lady of the Holy Spirit* (1985). Father Edmund writes: "[I] began writing with a view to publication in my seventy-fifth year of life. I thank God for his countless blessings."



EDMUND BRAND

The hermit's life befitted him,
 And yet he realized,
 That No Man is an Island to himself.
 For all his love of solitude
 He needed people too.
 Approachable, out-going, very human;
 Carefree, happy-go-lucky, free-wheeling;
 Mischievous, creative, passionate,
 Whenever opportunity
 Came near for socializing
 Uncle Louie was the center of the crowd.
 But when the fun was over he
 Withdrew thence to The Silent life . . .
 And there was Silence in Heaven!

By a sustained and serious effort
 He made The Ascent to Truth,
 To the cloud around the mountain top
 Where humans may hope to meet
 The Living God.

His influences extended far
 Beyond the cloister walls
 He promoted Contemplation
 In a World of Action.
 The basic principles, he said,
 Of Life and Holiness
 Are not for monks and nuns alone.
 Interior freedom is for all
 Who have the courage to behold
 The Infinite.

Reaching out to all in need,
 The friendless and afflicted,
 The poor, oppressed humanity,
 These were his deep concern.
 An advocate of civil rights,
 True love for one another;
 And peace, not nuclear annihilation,
 Not sowing Seeds of Destruction.
 Be armed with faith and fortitude,
 "The root of war is fear."

Aware of his own dire need
 For God and for His mercy,
 He reached out to all sinners, for
 He hurt as they were hurting.

Fraudulence and cruelty
 Infest the modern world,
 He described with poetic irony
 In Cables to the Ace.
 But Man is in a Divided Sea,
 Praising God in spite of all.

The Orient attracted him,
 Zen and the Birds of Appetite;
 The Way of Chuang Tzu,
 And dialogue with Suzuki; that
 East and West might meet together
 To know each other better.
 Faithful to his monastic call
 Amid distress and suffering,
 His search for God continued
 With unabated zeal.

After many years of longing
 For a mystical encounter,
 A grace which was not given him . . .
 Until at Mahabalipuram!
 Came that one illumination,
 Brief and sudden though it was,
 But fierce, piercing through the surface —
 His desire was fulfilled.

His Asian Journey, life itself,
 By now were nearly over.
 Looking pale and very tired,
 He gave his talk at Bangkok,
 Then ended quite prophetically:
 “Now I will disappear.”
 He then retired to his room
 Where an accident, or heart attack,
 Would strike a fatal blow.
 Found with bleeding gash and bruises,
 He lay lifeless on the floor.
 Now he could ask with Blessed Lutgarde:
 Lord, “What Are These Wounds?”

Epilogue. His body now
 Lies buried at Gethsemani,
 While his rich and varied works continue
 To illuminate the world.
 Hailed now among the greats
 In the realm of spirituality,
 His Exile Ends in Glory!