

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

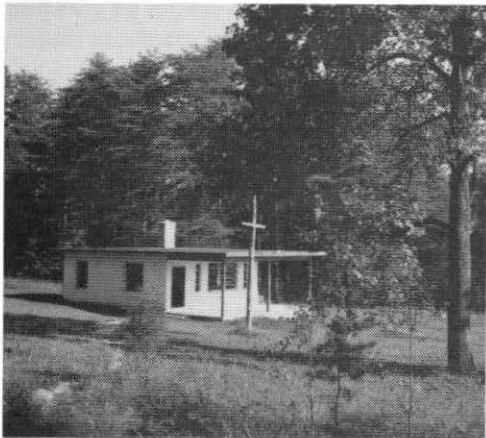
Review of

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*

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### THE HERMITAGE

Photo by Thomas Merton

Diary Kept While Working on the Biography of Thomas Merton (Kansas City: Andrews & McMeel, 1981) and (Garden City, New York: Doubleday Image, 1983).\*

Fr. M. Basil Pennington lived in the hermitage while researching *Thomas Merton, Brother Monk: The Quest for True Freedom* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1987), his "monastic" biography of Merton. In addition to his journalistic work, Pennington came to Gethsemani to wrestle with challenges to his own vocation: the need for spiritual renewal, clarifying his own ministry and acquiring a deeper knowledge of the implication of Merton's life and thought. Pennington listened to tapes of Merton's lectures, read from his manuscripts and journals, and reflected anew on the worldwide impact and influence of Thomas Merton.

*A Retreat with Thomas Merton* is a byproduct of Pennington's task as a biographer. It places Pennington's hermitage ruminations within the context of a week-long Advent retreat. Pennington prayed, read, tended the fire in the uninsulated hermitage, dealt with uninvited visitors, took "tramps" in the woods and listened to the rumble of artillery from Fort Knox. In short, he immersed himself in the context of daily life as Merton experienced it in his final years.

Pennington's hermitage experience yielded this list of qualities which he felt made Merton an effective and attractive communicator of the Truth: openness, the fact that "Tom" was up-to-date and well informed; that his message always remained personal; and, that he respected his hearers.

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\* *Editor's Note:* Fascination with Merton as a hermit and with his hermitage continues and has spawned a "hermitage literature" as a genre of writing about Merton. This literature consists mainly of poems about visits to and reflections on the hermitage though some prose accounts have been written. Among the earliest of the poems were Mark Van Doren's "St. Mary's Hermitage, Gethsemani" and Sister Therese Lentfoehr's "A Hill is for Celebration," both about visits to Merton and both published by him in his "little magazine," *Monks Pond* (1968). *The Merton Seasonal*, for example, has published the following poems: Susan Matthis Johnson's "Dream: For Tom Merton" (1988); Joe Pounder's "Return to the Hermitage: Reflections of a Return Visit to Merton's Hermitage" (1987); Brother Paul Quenon's "More Geography from Lograire: Written from Merton's Hermitage" (1985); and Ron Seitz's "In Memory of Thomas Merton: At the Hermitage" (1985). Prose writings include J. T. Ledbetter's "In the Footsteps of Thomas Merton," *LCA Partners* (December 1984-January 1985) and Brother John Albert's "Lights across the Ridge: Thomas Merton and Henry David Thoreau" in the forthcoming *Merton Annual* 1 (1988).