

ANOTHER MERTON JOURNEY

Review of
Esther de Waal

A Seven Day Journey with Thomas Merton

With a foreword by Henri Nouwen & photographs by Thomas Merton

Guildford, Surrey, England: Eagle, 1992

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Reviewed by **Paul M. Pearson**

A Seven Day Journey with Thomas Merton is the most recent book to appear from the Anglican laywoman, Dr. Esther de Waal. It follows on very well from her previous books which have brought new light for many people to the Rule of St. Benedict and to Celtic Christianity. Taking up the great Christian theme of journey, and a theme very dear to Thomas Merton, de Waal takes the reader on a journey with Merton. This book, though, is not so much a journey into Merton's writing, and into his theology, as a journey into God in the form of a seven day retreat with Thomas Merton as a companion.

When I first saw the title of this book I was a little skeptical of what I would find, thinking that it might be just one more attempt at retelling Merton's story, but my scepticism soon vanished as I picked it up and began to read it. The book itself is well presented. The text is well laid out, with lots of photographs by Merton, some of which have not been published before. Esther de Waal begins by setting some very simple and straightforward guidelines for using this book as a retreat and emphasizes clearly that by retreat she does not mean having to go away at great expense of time and money, but instead encourages the reader to undertake a retreat in daily life, from which, I felt, no one was excluded. After a brief synopsis of Merton's life in which she touches on some of the major themes of his writings, de Waal accompanies the reader into the first of the seven days of a retreat which captures the heart of Merton's message for modern women and men in a way that Basil Pennington never managed to achieve in his journal of a retreat at Gethsemani.

Each day of the retreat combines succinctly a skilful mixture of Merton's writings and photographs with the author's own ideas, along with quotes from the scriptures, especially the psalms and the gospels, and from some early monastic writings. I found that the amount of material each day was just about right for a person leading a normal, busy life with work and family commitments. My only major criticism was of the author's rather inadequate system of notes and references which sometimes made it unclear which quotes in the text were being referred to, a problem made worse by an error in the page numbers referred to by the notes.

In *A Seven Day Journey with Thomas Merton*, Esther de Waal has achieved what I would regard as the best introduction to praying with the writings of Thomas Merton to have been written so far. Along with this achievement, she also introduces the reader to Merton's major ideas and presents all this in a most attractive and readable book.

□ **Paul M. Pearson** lives at St. Peter's Monastery in East Dulwich, London, England. He is a frequent reviewer of Merton books and a frequent contributor to *The Merton Seasonal*. A member of *The International Thomas Merton Society*, he will present a paper, "Thomas Merton and the Christian Search for Holiness and Wholeness," at the Third General Meeting in 1993.