

from such quibbles, we should welcome back into print one of Merton's last projects.

Thomas Merton

PREVIEW OF THE ASIAN JOURNEY

Edited with an Introduction by Walter H. Capps

New York: Crossroad, 1989

114 pages — \$13.95 hardcover

Reviewed by **Bonnie Bowman Thurston**

Readers who are familiar with Merton scholarship will remember that Walter Capps wrote one of the best articles on Merton's significance that was produced in the flurry of analysis and scholarly activity ten years after his death. "Thomas Merton's Legacy" appeared in the March/ April 1979 issue of *The Center Magazine* and described Merton's contributions to the new contemplative and social era in religion. Now, twenty years after Merton's death, Capps has edited the dialogue which Merton engaged in at the Center for the Study of Democratic Institutions in Santa Barbara, California, on 3 October 1968, a few days before he left on his Asian pilgrimage. Like the article, this longer work helps us to put Merton's importance as an intellectual into perspective.

A thin volume, *Preview of the Asian Journey* contains an introductory essay, the transcription of Merton's dialogue, and two short essays (one on the ancient Mesoamerican city of Monte Alban and one a reflection on Roderick Nash's *Wilderness and the American Mind*) which were published in *The Center Magazine* and which have appeared elsewhere. The value of this volume is the dialogue, which with *Thomas Merton in Alaska*, makes an important contribution to our knowledge of Merton's thought in the last year of his life. As the introduction notes, the dialogue is part of the record of Merton's first extended period away from Gethsemani, is one of the only times Merton met with a group of intellectuals, is an indication of why he wanted to travel to Asia, and is a record of the manner and style in

which Merton thought and spoke. This final aspect is of importance and might well have been problematic. Those who have listened to any of the Merton tapes have an idea of how difficult! The problem of transferring the spoken word to the written are gracefully handled by Capps through inclusion of "stage directions" which give the reader visual clues and atmosphere and through footnotes introducing the other speakers.

The participants in and the subject matter of the dialogue are wide-ranging. Merton is introduced by W. H. "Ping" Ferry and fields questions from Donald McDonald, Frank Kelly, Edward Crowther, John Seeley, Bishop James Pike, Gerald Gottlieb, Judy Saltzman, Peter Marin, John Wilkinson, Rex Tugwell, William Gorman, and John Cogley. We are able to hear Merton in conversation with some of the best minds of the time, sometimes holding his own — and sometimes not. The substance of the conversation ranges over monastic renewal and marginality, the Pentecostal movement, the influence of Eastern mysticism on Christianity and on "pop spirituality," idolatry and prosperity, and what was then termed "the underground church."

Perhaps what will be most interesting to those familiar with Merton will be to see how he handles himself with his intellectual equals and betters. In this context he does not have the "monastic mystique" on his side, and, while his partners in dialogue are respectful, they push him in a way others with whom we have seen him did not. Frequently issues are raised and then dropped. Merton picks up and then discards a tantalizing idea. While we might wish he had finished many of his thoughts, we recognize Merton's characteristically agile, if not entirely focused, mind.

The dialogue helps us to see more clearly the reasons why Merton wanted to travel in Asia and what he was expecting to discover. While the language sounds slightly dated at points, the basic themes (authentic religious experience, the need for genuine community, idolatry, the contemplative life and social action) are still timely and important.

Turning to the essays, the reader will certainly wonder if they were not included to make a book-length work. "The Sacred City" on Monte Alban reveals once again the variety of subjects on which Merton wrote with apparent authority. Merton evinces a certain romanticism about things ancient which is unsettling. "The Wild Places" also deals with the primitive, but in a literary and intellectual context that curbs Merton's romanticism.

Merton enthusiasts might well have gotten along without reading of his enthusiasm for the Zapotecs, but they would have missed an important

introduction to his Asian experience had this dialogue not been made available. What it contains and what it suggests is well worth the hefty price of the volume. Having seen how well dialogue can be edited to work in print, we might hope that others who have access to Merton's informal conversations might be encouraged by Capps's volume to prepare their material for publication.

Thomas Merton

THE ROAD TO JOY:

Letters to New and Old Friends

Selected and Edited with an Introduction by Robert E. Daggy
New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1989
xvi, 383 pages — \$27.95 hardcover

Reviewed by **Jane Marie Richardson**

*A faithful friend is a sturdy shelter:
one who finds a friend finds a treasure. (Sirach 6:14)*

Three years before his death Merton wrote: "I could fill another page with names of people I have loved to be with and loved to hear from. Lax, above all, and Mark Van Doren and all the old friends, Ad Reinhardt and so on." It is especially these "old friends" who are celebrated in *The Road to Joy: Letters to New and Old Friends*, although readers will certainly be glad for the "new" ones included, the term being used quite broadly. All of these friends, new and old, underscore the kind of spontaneous bonding that Merton could establish so readily. Making and keeping friends came as easily to him as praying.

This gift of identifying so simply and honestly with his correspondents is, of course, characteristic of Merton's writing as a whole. The personal nature of letters, however, accentuates this trait and accounts so much for Merton's continuing power to speak to an ever-widening community of earnest searchers. It is this ability to create bonds and to express them, even in letters hastily written, that helps us to realize how deeply integrated into his being was Merton's awareness of everyone's