

*Thomas Merton, Monk: a Monastic Tribute*, edited by Brother Patrick Hart (Doubleday Image, 1976; originally published in 1974 by The Abbey at Gethsemani).

After Thomas Merton's death in 1968, many of those who had lived in his Cistercian community or who had corresponded with him felt the need to write about "their" Merton—someone not entirely identical with the man whose writings have been so widely influential. The twelve essays, four poems, and the homily given at his funeral Mass in this volume were written by monks and nuns from Europe and America, most of whom knew him personally; among them, his abbot James Fox, O.C.S.O.; the well-known student of Eastern spirituality David Steindl-Rast, O.S.B.; and Merton's personal secretary, Patrick Hart, O.C.S.O.

The titles of individual essays build a multi-faceted portrait of Merton as others knew him: the monk, the solitary, the man of prayer, the evolving monk, the spiritual writer, the contemplative, the spiritual son, the Zen master, the monk of renewal, the ecumenical monk and more. While most of the essays reflect the relationship Merton had with each of the authors, Steindl-Rast's contribution apparently includes almost a verbatim transcript of the talk on prayer that Thomas Merton gave to a few monks and nuns who had gone to the Redwoods Monastery in Whitethorn, California, to meet him as he was leaving on his trip to Asia.

Here are a few of Merton's own words in Steindl-Rast's essay:

“The desert becomes a paradise when it is accepted as desert. The desert can never be anything but a desert if we are trying to escape it. But once we fully accept it in union with the passion of Christ, it becomes a paradise. This is a great theological point: any attempt to renew the contemplative life is going to have to include this element of sacrifice, uncompromising sacrifice.”

Because this book is basically biographical, you will find it in the Biography section of the Contemplative Outreach Lending Library at Grace Episcopal Church. The book collection is available any time the church building is open and the library room is not occupied by the occasional group meeting. If you have questions, please feel free to contact the volunteer library coordinator, Carol Mock (314.567.6353, seajayk@yahoo.com).