

Foreword

The School of the Spirit by Thomas Merton

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Following on the heels of the phenomenal success of *The Seven Storey Mountain*, Thomas Merton made several attempts to begin a new book in early 1949. On February 15 he confides to his journal that he has written some forty pages, "mostly in blood," since the end of the retreat, and he was not happy with the results. . . . Five days later, on February 20, he seems to have had a breakthrough, as he writes: ". . . [*The Cloud and the Fire*], now changed and called *The School of the Spirit* goes quite smoothly. I have to simply sit down at the typewriter with what I want to say planned out. That is the *sine qua non*—even if I write something completely different, as I did today."¹ Merton was attempting to write a book on the beauties of the contemplative life for all, a life based on the perfection of love.

Apparently his enthusiasm did not last long, because after having written three chapters, a total of about seventy pages, he abandoned the manuscript once again. This time it was not to be revived. What we have here are the first two chapters of *The School of the Spirit*, which were discovered shortly after Merton's death in the collection of Sr. Thérèse Lentfoehr, S.D.S., in Racine, Wisconsin. She had written to me about another unpublished manuscript called *The Inner Experience*, which she was anxious to read. We had the original here, and I agreed

1. Jonathan Montaldo, ed. *Entering the Silence: Becoming a Monk and Writer: The Journals of Thomas Merton*, Volume Two 1941–1952 (San Francisco: Harper San Francisco 1996) 282–3.

to send her a copy in exchange for a copy of *The School of the Spirit*. Thus we bartered! And fortunately for Bellarmine College, since I was able later to provide a copy for their Merton collection as well.

On November 14, 1967, the year before Merton embarked on his pilgrimage to the Far East, he finally signed a legal document establishing the Merton Legacy Trust with Naomi Burton Stone, Thomasine O'Callaghan, and James Laughlin as trustees. One of the many duties was outlined in this document under "A. Trustees Powers: d) Publish my drafts of books in manuscript form which have not been published with specific exceptions of *The Inner Experience* and *The School of the Spirit* which are not to be published as books. Even though these specific manuscripts are not to be published [as books], the Trustees may permit qualified scholars to quote from said works."²

Fortunately, the Trustees interpreted the last line of the above document as allowing the publication of these two restricted manuscripts in a scholarly journal, but not in book form. Thus, *The Inner Experience*, which was revised any number of times by Merton during the last decade of his life, as indicated by the various colors of ink used in the revisions, first appeared in eight numbers of *Cistercian Studies* (1983–1984).³ It has become very popular and still in demand by readers.

The School of the Spirit on the other hand had no revisions, and the sources in Latin were not indicated. Merton had simply abandoned the typescript and sent a copy to Sister Thérèse for her collection, which she later gave to Columbia University. I had originally planned to run it in *Cistercian Studies*, and had obtained permission from the Merton Trust, but I then abandoned the idea since I had resigned as editor of *Cistercian Studies* after ten years in that service. Thus, it remained on the shelf until Dr. Victor Kramer, current editor of *The Merton Annual*, asked me if I knew of some unpublished Merton material that could be used in *The Merton Annual 10*. I immediately thought of *The School of the Spirit*, and after securing permission from the Merton Legacy Trust, sent a copy of the manuscript to him. He and I thought it best to publish only the first two chapters, since there was a missing page in the third and last chapter which was left unfinished.

He asked me to arrange for translations of the Latin in the text, and to provide a foreword, giving the historical background of this incomplete and until now unpublished Merton work.

I am happy to see the opening two chapters of *The School of the Spirit* finally see the light of day. I want to thank Dr. Robert Urekew of Saint Catherine's College, Springfield, Kentucky, for his assistance in tracking down the sources and providing the translations. Finally, a word of gratitude is in order to the Trustees of the Merton Legacy Trust for making this manuscript available to readers of *The Merton Annual*.

2. Unpublished manuscript: *Merton Legacy Trust*, 14 November 1967, Louisville, Kentucky, eight pages.

3. *Cistercian Studies Quarterly*: the eight numbers that comprise *The Inner Experience*, are available in offprint form from CSQ Administration: Sr. Sheryl Chen, O.C.S.O., Santa Rita Abbey, HC 1 Box 929, Sonoita, AZ 85637-9705.