

# INTRODUCTION

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The materials selected for volume two of *The Merton Annual* reflect Thomas Merton's gift of producing a wide variety of writings and the generation, by and through those writings, of diverse scholarly inquiries and personal reflections. As monk and writer Merton was drawn into areas of inquiry ranging from the autobiographical to concerns about all humankind. The subtitle of *The Merton Annual* is "Studies in Thomas Merton, Religion, Culture, Literature & Social Concerns," and all these categories are represented here and often in ways which suggest interaction among the categories. Several of the pieces selected for volume two investigate religious and spiritual topics. The lectures by David B. Burrell and Arthur Middleton; the retreat notes by Frank A. Peake; the essays by Marilyn King and George A. Kilcourse; and the comparative study by Kun Ki Kang — all reflect religious concerns, yet these studies stress that spirituality and religion remain grounded in concerns for particulars and for the individual as a person within a culture. Merton usually made such connections. Thus, religion and social concerns are not separate categories. The same is true of Merton's literary endeavors.

Thomas Merton learned to look at other cultures to strengthen his understanding of his own situation. The essay by Stefan Baciu, reprinted here along with Merton's own little-known "Answers for Hernan Lavin Cerdá" and "Letter to a Poet about Vallejo," emphasizes his interest in Latin America and reflects his enthusiasm for the freshness of contemporary poetry written outside a conventional Western European context.

In a seminal essay Chrysogonus Waddell demonstrates that Merton could write about the lesser-known Cistercian blesseds and saints (if asked to) and simultaneously (in an almost audacious manner) plan for many other projects which included poetry, translations and historical studies. The "Appendix" for that article, a letter written by Merton to the Capitular Fathers of the Cistercian Order after he had been a monk for only five years, outlines his ambitious literary and scholarly plans in the mid 1940s.

A significant part of his literary endeavors in the 1940s was the writing of poetry. Sheila Hempstead examines some of this early poetry through his use of bell imagery and symbolism. Two areas of Merton's interest — art and education — have been little studied. This book provides several examples of his artistic talent as well as of his interest in art: the drawing which graces the cover; the photographs used as graphic dividers; and the prayers printed as "Appendix A" to the article by Donna Kristoff, an essay which reveals another facet of Merton's interests: icons — a fascination which was still developing at the end of his life. Merton was an educator, at Columbia and St. Bonaventure Universities, before he entered the Cistercian Order and later served as Master of Scholastics and Master of Novices at the Abbey of Gethsemani. Thomas Del Prete discusses the ways in which Merton's views on education coincide with his basic theme of the individual's self-discovery. The review section, interestingly, includes a review of *The Merton Tapes*, taken from the lectures which Merton delivered to the novices at Gethsemani while he supervised their monastic formation or "education." Merton's own range of inquiry certainly included the autobiographical and two selections in this volume augment his own accounts by dealing with personal reminiscences about him: the interview with Mary Luke Tobin and the mood piece by Paul Quenon.

Ten reviews of books, as well as the tapes, are included at the end of this volume, two of them — *Encounter: Thomas Merton and D. T. Suzuki* and *A Vow of Conversation: Journals, 1964-1965* — are of material by Merton himself. The other seven books are about Merton and the variety of these books, appearing twenty years after his death, reinforces our conviction of the need for *The Merton Annual*. Books continue to appear regularly and the scope of scholarly and reflective writing being done clearly demonstrates a continuing appeal.

The editors believe that the range of materials chosen here will assist scholars as well as general readers in search of the authentic Merton. Just as Merton himself would have continued to ask questions, these essays and reviews raise significant questions about our wider culture. It is important that such questions continue to be raised about Merton's life and writings and about issues which concerned him. *The Merton Annual* should serve as a forum in which these and related questions about Merton and his world continue to be examined.

THE EDITORS