2011 Bibliographic Review
Pointing Fingers at the Calm Eye of the Storm

Joseph Quinn Raab

Introduction

Superstorm Sandy has struck, flooding huge swaths of land, taking lives, destroying homes, and countless folks on the eastern seaboard are still without power as I write this. Like a mantra, Merton's words from Bangkok, "You cannot rely on structures,"[1] keep hammering in my head. Of course, we must rely on each other and to a lesser degree on the structures we create. Yet sometimes forceful events remind us that such reliance is fragile and tentatively placed. Upon what can we rely? What refuge, what ark, what invisible lifeboat keeps hope afloat in such times? Merton was never short of words on these questions, assuring himself and his readers that it was "neither a what nor a thing" upon which we could ultimately rely. Rather, his words were pointing to Christ and His Peace – a peace that the world cannot give. His words were always pointing. As the old Zen saying goes: "all instruction is but a finger pointing and those whose gaze is fixed upon the pointer will never see beyond." It's consoling to discover that those who continue to write about Merton, and those just beginning to, generally portray Merton as a "finger pointing" and help us to follow the trajectory of that pointing. Gladly, few get too fixated on the dirt under the fingernail.

Wading through what seems a flood of materials about Merton published in 2011, I began to think of Merton as analogous to the weather. In his prophetic voice, he was a rage of lightning-flash epiphanies and thundering revelations, bursting in a deluge of baptismal words that could flood out evil and birth new life. In his contemplative voice, words like gentle rains nourished faith and opened petals of promise; the raging storm quieted, leaving only the silent and central Word of that Love that is hidden and shining everywhere. At his best, Merton's literary life was either a raging storm whose calm eye is Christ or a playful, sapiential shower. At his worst, Merton felt his voice could turn petty or defensive or "verbological" and obscure the center – his words pointing too much to himself or to some other distracting triviality. The same can be said of the words written about him. Some of them stingingly convict, clarify

1. Thomas Merton, *The Asian Journal*, ed. Naomi Burton Stone, Brother Patrick Hart and James Laughlin (New York: New Directions, 1973) 338.

and reveal, some obfuscate and blur, but still through these words one can glimpse the calm eye shining at Merton's own center, the wisdom at play in the rain of his words – the better ones just make it easier.

Books[2]

John Eudes Bamberger, OCSO once commented on Merton's wide appeal, suggesting that when people read Merton they find him speaking from within themselves, as if Merton were giving voice to their most intimate thoughts. I recalled this comment when reading Fiona Gardner's *Precious Thoughts: Daily Readings from the Correspondence of Thomas Merton* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 2011). Here Merton, through Gardner's expert editing, gives voice to some of our deepest longings and most dearly held truths, but he also speaks *to us* with words we need to hear. At times I felt that the jewels that Gardner had lifted from Merton's copious correspondences were really addressed to me. Of course this was her intent and she admirably succeeds in this little book. With Merton, Gardner clearly desires "to gradually lift us toward divinity" and she has selected some precious thoughts that do just that (12).

Kenneth Bragan, in his book *The Making of a Saint: A Psychological Study of the Life of Thomas Merton* (Durham, CT: Strategic Book Group, 2011), is interested in how writing functioned for Merton as a means to becoming a spiritual master. But Bragan's central thesis, that Merton's falling in love with the nurse marked *the pinnacle* of his spiritual journey, is ultimately reductive and not effectively tied to his broader theme of writing as a means to spiritual maturity. Undoubtedly, Merton's affair is a significant piece of his overall story, but to emphasize it to the extent that Bragan does requires a forced reading. Bragan would certainly arrive at a more substantive understanding of Merton's embrace of the *anima* if he were to contextualize that embrace in a theological rather than a Jungian and Freudian paradigm. The latter can be useful to be sure, but if one wants to argue that Merton had become "a saint," one might need to venture into a theological or transcendent horizon, to follow Merton's pointed finger even further.

Several other books appeared during 2011 in which Merton receives significant attention, ranging in topics from art to interreligious dialogue. These include *Profiles in Discipleship: Stories of Faith and Courage* by

2. Books that receive individual reviews in this volume of *The Merton Annual* will not be considered in this essay. Likewise, though Monica Weis's *The Environmental Vision of Thomas Merton* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky) was published in 2011, it was the subject of a review symposium in the previous volume of *The Merton Annual* (24 [2011] 281-323) and so will not be reviewed herein.

Gregory C. Higgins (New York: Paulist Press, 2011); *Peace Be with You: Monastic Wisdom for a Terror-Filled World* by David Carlson (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2011); Joseph Masheck's *Texts On (Texts On) Art* (Berkeley, CA: Brooklyn Rail and Black Square Editions, 2011); and *The Third Desert: The Story of Monastic Interreligious Dialogue* by Fabrice Blée (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2011). In a chapter called "Strangers" in *Profiles in Discipleship* (57-75), Higgins reflects on Antony of the Desert, Mother Syncletica, John Cassian and Thomas Merton. Here, Merton is lauded both for his capacity to discuss the spiritual life in compelling and accessible ways and for opening dialogue with other faith traditions on spiritual virtues such as humility and purity of heart. David Carlson, a former Baptist who through an engagement with monastic sources and the Christian contemplative tradition found his way to Orthodox Christianity, brings us a compelling and thoughtful book of "Monastic Wisdom for a Terror-Filled World" (as the subtitle reads). Much of the book relays interviews Carlson conducted post-9/11 with members of contemplative orders about their reactions to that day and lessons learned in its wake. Merton, whom Carlson had come to trust as a guide who tells "the uncommon truth," provides a constant hermeneutic lens for Carlson as he interprets the correspondences with contemporary monks and nuns. I found the chapters on "9/11's Most Taboo Word – Forgiveness" and "The Death of Osama bin Laden and America's Via Dolorosa" challenging and wise. Merton would be delighted, I think, at the use that Carlson makes of Merton's prophetic voice. Joseph Masheck's fascinating book *Texts On (Texts On) Art* covers a lot of ground, astutely commenting on the work of modern artists, architects and theorists such as Matisse, Duchamp, Le Corbusier and Lacan. Most of the material extends far beyond the realm of my own expertise; however, Merton's friend Ad Reinhardt is featured in two chapters. One of those chapters explores the friendship of Merton and Reinhardt through the lens of Columbia's influence on both of them. Mascheck, noted art critic, historian and professor, is himself a fellow Columbia graduate and later a Columbia professor. This gives Masheck's perspective an unusual and welcome sympathy with both Merton and Reinhardt. Finally, in *The Third Desert*, Blée traces the official level of monastic interreligious dialogue, from its unofficial beginnings in the work of figures such as Merton, Bede Griffiths and Abishiktananda (Henri le Saux) through the official establishment of the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue, and various other conferences connected to specific monastic orders, in the wake of Vatican II. In spite of the absence of a serious look at Benedict XVI's promotion of interreligious dialogue (Blée focuses much more on

what precedes Benedict XVI), the book is an indispensable resource for scholars of this important area and anyone who wants to consider where Merton fits into the official trajectory of Catholicism's engagement with non-Christian religious traditions.

Articles

Ryan Scruggs pens a challenging and substantial exploration of Merton's theological position and method with respect to interreligious dialogue that avoids the two extremes of an insular and defensive apologetics on the one hand and a facile syncretism on the other. In "Faith Seeking Understanding: Theological Method in Thomas Merton's Interreligious Dialogue" (*Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 46.3 [Summer 2011] 411-26), Scruggs skillfully demonstrates how Merton, through a careful study of Karl Barth's explication of St. Anselm's *Proslogion*, settles on a position for dialogue "that seeks a common ground with the other and a *purpose* for dialogue that, already obscurely apprehending the truth in faith, seeks the joy of faith fully understood" (411).

In "Thomas Merton, Spiritual Identity, and Religious Dialogue: The Walls of New Freedom" (*Perspectives in Religious Studies* 38.2 [2011] 195-213), Bill Leonard travels familiar territory, examining Merton's life and works. Leonard, however, insightfully focuses in on Merton as a bridge between Catholicism and Protestantism, faith and action, peace and justice, and religious pluralism in the American context, both during Merton's own time and for us today. Especially fascinating in this piece is Leonard's look at Merton's assessment of the "genius and disaster" of the *sola fides* principle. Following Merton, Leonard elucidates how *sola fides* can lead to a truncated grasp of conversion, what he calls "conversionism," where the great problem becomes the salvation of the saved – or quoting Merton – "the salvation of those who, being good, think they have no further need to be saved and imagine their task is to make others 'good' like themselves" (208). This "conversionism" opposes a *conversio morum* that is an ongoing struggle for sanctity, a downward path into genuine humility. The culture-bound conversionism which mutes prophecy continues, Leonard suggests, "to haunt American evangelicalism" (208). Leonard concludes his piece with some thoughtful bullet points regarding Merton's lessons for us today.

Dennis Patrick O'Hara's "Thomas Merton and Thomas Berry: Reflections from a Parallel Universe," which was originally published in *The Merton Annual* 13 (2000) 222-34, reappeared in *Religion and Science: Critical Concepts in Religious Studies* edited by Sara Fletcher Harding and Nancy Morvillo (vol. 4 [New York: Routledge, 2011] 362-73). O'Hara's

piece examines how the work of Merton and Berry parallel one another, sacralizing the universe and the Earth community through a Christocentrism that admits no divine afterthoughts. That is to say, the Incarnation is not understood as a response to sin, but as eternally willed and linked to creation itself. Therefore, the entire universe is being presently spoken in the Word and, as Merton put it in a letter to Rachel Carson, is "a transparent manifestation of the love of God . . . a paradise of His own wisdom, manifested in all its creatures, down to the tiniest, and in the most wonderful interrelationship between them."[3]

In "Legacies of Reading in the Late Poetry of Thomas Merton" (*Texas Studies in Literature and Language* 53.2 [Summer 2011] 115-37), Dustin Stewart examines two legacies that influenced Merton's reading and writing of poetry, one from Rainer Maria Rilke and the other from Roland Barthes. Rilke's hopeful vision is dialogical in nature, intends a reader, and owns then a responsibility to the reader. The other legacy, according to Stewart, stemming from Barthes' *Writing Degree Zero*,[4] is less concerned, or even hopeful about, an author's ability to write for someone else, or for a writer *to be read*. In this view, the author is solely responsible to the writing, since the reader doesn't read the poet but "just reads writing" and any pretension to ascendency on the part of the poet must be abandoned. This leaves the writer "anti-writing" in Merton's view. While this second legacy is surely helpful as a hermeneutical key to Merton's later poetry, Stewart persuasively concludes that Merton's later work, especially *The Geography of Lograire*, is influenced by both legacies and "invites the sort of appropriation that it also mourns" (127).

Paul Contino offers a powerful presentation of Merton's friendship with Czeslaw Milosz (1911-2004) in "Milosz and Merton at the Metropolis: The Corn of Wheat Bears Fruit in *Second Space*" (*Renascence* 63.3 [Spring 2011] 177-87). In Contino's presentation, Merton and Milosz reflect Dostoevsky's characters Alyosha and Ivan as the latter pair converse in a tavern called the Metropolis in *The Brothers Karamazov*. Through their deeply personal correspondence, Merton plays the Christ-centered Alyosha to Milosz's more cynical Ivan. In Contino's reading of their relationship, Merton may have planted seeds that help Milosz, long after Merton's death, to finally come around to a view much closer to Alyosha's than to Ivan's. Contino finds evidence for this fruition in

3. The full quotation O'Hara includes is much longer and is taken from Thomas Merton, *Witness to Freedom: Letters in Times of Crisis*, ed. William H. Shannon (New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 1994) 71.

4. Roland Barthes, *Writing Degree Zero*, trans. Annette Lavers and Colin Smith (London: Jonathan Cape, 1967).

several of Milosz's poems that appear in *Second Space*.[5]

In the Eastertide edition of *The Merton Journal* (18.1 [2011]), we find several gems. "Another Kind of Trifling" (33-40), by former *Merton Journal* editor Gary Hall, explores some of the technological traps that lead us into various degrees of trifling, distracting us from a pure and singular desire. Merton, even early at the dawn of the information age, expressed concern that his own life was being cluttered up by trivialities and "pure trifling" and that these distractions were beginning to cloud his own work (33). Hall, reflecting on the ubiquitous role of screens in our lives, finds consolation and sober clarity in Merton's critique of our trifling, a critique that keeps us critically on guard against the disintegration that inevitably comes when we begin to define ourselves through our purchases and virtual avatars.

Three other pieces in the same issue are tied together by their meditation on the transformative power of silence: Nass Cannon's "Attending to the Presence of God: Thomas Merton and *Le Point Vierge*" (11-17); Fiona Gardner's "Being in the Dark: Explorations in Purification and Renewal" (20-26); and Paul Pearson's "Let Mercy Fall Like Rain: Thomas Merton and the Ox Mountain Parable" (42-49). Drawing from a wide swath of Merton's corpus, Cannon writes beautifully and freshly in a voice close to Merton's own: "Through grace we recover our true self by the work of Christ in us who transforms us by shrouding himself with the wounds of our sins." This transformative process, facilitated by long periods of silence, reveals the hiding place of God in us, "inaccessible to our meddling but realized by . . . the recovery of our innocence before God, [by which] we see through spiritual eyes that paradise is all around, that every point is equidistant to God, that God's light shines through the natural world, and a blazing light like a diamond resides in everyone" (13). In her piece, Fiona Gardner links ascetic discipline with mystical union. Drawing from Merton's poems, letters, journal writings, and even the more theoretical *Ascent to Truth*, she highlights a self-emptying withdrawal, even from *meaning*. This mystic path does not end in melancholic *asymbolia* but is rather an *acedia* opening to divine illumination. With her masterful facility, Gardner compellingly illustrates that "being in the heart of darkness" can awaken consolations and desolations but the "purification of the night" as the Ox Mountain Parable reminds us, "brings renewal with the dawn" (24). In his illuminating article, Paul Pearson, through a detailed study of Merton's life and writings in the late fifties and early sixties, elucidates Merton's changing conception of himself from an innocent to a guilty bystander and finally to a declared

5. Czeslaw Milosz, *Second Space: New Poems* (New York: HarperCollins, 2004).

witness to the mercy of God that like the night spirit and the dawn air in Mencius' parable saves us from a persistent *rhinoceritis*, that left alone, would lay waste to the world.

Dr. Pearson also published "Hospitality to the Stranger: Thomas Merton and St. Benedict's Exhortation to Welcome the Stranger as Christ" (*American Benedictine Review* 62.1 [March 2011] 27-41), in which he explores the relevance of this exhortation even for Merton the hermit, and the eremitical life more broadly. Pearson shows how Merton struggles to overcome a *fuga mundi* that would have him turn his back on the world and arrives at a welcoming disposition that allows the strangers of the world to be bearers to him and to us of God's mercy. As he writes in his conclusion: "we learn to do many of the things we were warned about as a child, using knives properly, driving a car, drinking a gin and tonic, but we find it much harder to overcome our fear of strangers and to be open to the gifts they bring us including, as St. Benedict tells us, the mercy of God" (39). This requires, as Pearson notes, the courage to risk having our hearts broken.

In the Advent edition of *The Merton Journal* (18:2 [2011]), John Collins shares a reflection on "Thomas Merton and *Siddhartha*" (32-42). The bulk of the article familiarizes the reader with Hermann Hesse and the influences operative upon him as he told the story of a man on a journey who finally realizes a perfect unity that spills out in compassion. Though Merton finished reading this novel just as he was embarking on his Asian journey to discover the absolute emptiness that is at once compassion, he does not comment on it at all in his journal. Collins, noting the congruencies of the fictional Siddhartha's epiphany and Merton's actual epiphany at Polonnaruwa, is emboldened to conjecture about the former's potential influence on the latter.

Jonathan Martin Ciraulo has given us a thoughtful and balanced analysis of "Thomas Merton's Creative (dis)Obedience" in *Cistercian Studies Quarterly* 46.2 (2011) 189-219. Ciraulo demonstrates how Merton struggled to submit both to his immediate religious superiors and the wider Church but still "developed a thoughtful spirituality of obedience that kept him faithful to his vows" (189-90). Most compelling is Ciraulo's depiction of Merton's growing admiration for the nineteenth-century "saintly Englishman" John Henry Cardinal Newman. By listening to Meriol Trevor's biography of Newman[6] as it was read aloud to the monks dur-

6. Ciraulo says the biography was Meriol Trevor's *Newman's Journey*, but that book first appeared in 1974 (St. Anthony Messenger Press); more likely it was Trevor's two-volume work: *Newman: The Pillar of the Cloud*; *Newman: Light in Winter* (London: Macmillan, 1962-63). Also possible, but less likely, is *Newman: A Portrait Restored*, which Trevor wrote

ing their silent meals, Merton drew strength from the theologian. Ciraulo includes this passage from Merton's July 9, 1965 journal entry:[7]

> The Life of Newman, which still goes on in the refectory is to me inexhaustibly important and full of meaning. The whole thing is there, existentially not explicit, but there for the grasping. The reality is on his kind of obedience and his kind of refusal. Complete obedience to the Church and complete, albeit humble, refusal of the pride and chicanery of Churchmen. (210)

Through his essay, Ciraulo hopes to lift up Merton as a kind of model for those who struggle with fidelity, and with discerning to whom it is owed, in a Church worthy of our allegiance and yet in need of prophetic refusals of the sham and lies tied up with it.

Reaching a French-speaking audience, Dominique Brulé's "Thomas Merton: Une Biographie Spirituelle (1915-1941)," which appeared in *Collectanea Cisterciensia* 72 (2010) 385-404, employs Kierkegaard's vision of "purity of heart" as "the capacity to will one thing" as a lens to view Merton's route from seemingly aimless wandering to Catholicism, monasticism and then priesthood. Using material from *The Seven Storey Mountain* augmented by materials from Merton's personal journal entries, Brulé recounts the focusing of Merton's multidirectional and contradictory hungers into a singular desire to love Christ.

Christopher Pramuk, in his article "Wisdom, Our Sister: Thomas Merton's Reception of Russian Sophiology" (*Spiritus: A Journal of Christian Spirituality* 11.2 [Fall 2011] 177-99), brilliantly explores how Merton had internalized "a deep thread in the Christian East, namely the Sophia tradition of Russian Orthodoxy" (177). This article serves as a nice summative introduction to Pramuk's 2009 masterful work *Sophia: The Hidden Christ of Thomas Merton* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2009).

Two "dialogue" pieces from doctoral students also deserve mention. First, Joan Braune, a doctoral candidate at the University of Kentucky, published the interesting piece "Erich Fromm and Thomas Merton: Biophilia, Necrophilia, and Messianism" in *Fromm Forum* (English Edition, vol. 15 [Tuebingen: Selbtsverlag, 2011] 43-48).[8] Braune explores Fromm's biophilic messianism as articulated in his 1963 pamphlet *War Within Man* which includes critical responses from Merton and three

---

with A. M. Allchin and John Coulson (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1965).

7. Thomas Merton, *Dancing in the Water of Life: Seeking Peace in the Hermitage. Journals, vol. 5: 1963-1965*, ed. Robert E. Daggy (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1997) 266.

8. Available online at: http://www.erich-fromm.de/biophil/joomla/images/stories/pdf-Dateien?Braune_J_2011.pdf.

others: psychoanalysts Roy Menninger and Jerome Frank and theologian Paul Tillich.[9] In Braune's view, only Merton gives Fromm a fair and favorable hearing and she explores Fromm's concepts of necrophilia and biophilia in light of Fromm's and Merton's long-time correspondence which she considers a model for Marxist-Christian dialogue. Secondly, Stefanie Hugh-Donovan, a doctoral student at Heythrop College, University of London, published "Ecclesial Thought and Life Trajectories: An Ecumenical Dialogue" (*One in Christ* 45.1 [2011] 35-53), in which she examines the parallels that obtain between Thomas Merton and the French Orthodox lay theologian Olivier Clément, who were both born in the Languedoc region of France and "journeyed through atheistic negation to a mature experience of Christian faith" (35). She explores how each was influenced by the Patristic tradition, Orthodoxy and iconography, arriving at "a faithful rootedness in his own ecclesial tradition with a deep respect for the 'other'" (35).

"Thomas Merton, An Artist of the Monastery" (*Benedictines* 63.1 [2010] 14-20) by psychologist and longtime Merton scholar Suzanne Zuercher, OSB, offers a brief and poignant reflection on Merton's perennial struggle against narcissism, his love-hate relationship with his artist self. In Zuercher's reading, Merton exemplifies the universal struggle we share to let God create us, to be the Artist of our lives, rather than "trying to be God in our lives, remaking ourselves into people we judge to be 'satisfactory'" (15). A contemplative discipline serves as a gracious antidote, and for Merton this led over time to increasing simplicity in his art, whereby his sketches and literary and photographic productions began to "speak peacefully and straightforwardly that their very existence is their justification. Just being is good" (20).

In a similar vein, Kick Bras's "Thomas Merton: Word from the Silence" (*Studies in Spirituality* 21 [2011] 261-71) explores Merton's essay "Day of a Stranger" and through his analysis of that piece suggests that "the man of language, the language artist" learned to listen to the silence and to give it expression in a language that does not "betray the experience of unity, that does not cause violence" and faithfully renders an expression of the "one central tonic note . . . *the* Word" (271).

In "Thomas Merton and Confucianism: Why the Contemplative Never Got the Religion Quite Right" (*First Things* [March 2011] 41-46), Confucian scholar Wm. Theodore de Bary considers why Merton's assessment of Confucianism, though generally positive, never rose to the level of appreciation that he had for Buddhism and Daoism, the two other great

9. Erich Fromm, *War Within Man: A Psychological Enquiry into the Roots of Destructiveness* (Philadelphia: American Friends Service Committee, 1963).

traditions that shaped China. Though Merton lauded what he called the "pure" Confucian ideal which was personalistic and humanistic, he was critical of a too worldly tendency within Confucianism, that was concerned with "making a living, raising a family and leaving a good name." On de Bary's reading, this Confucian concern did not jive well with Merton's personal history and his monastic vocation. A second and related reason de Bary finds for Merton not ranking Confucianism with the other two traditions stems from Merton's tendency to preference personal transformation and liberation as prior to social reform, something Confucianism resists, since it emphasizes the social constitution of personal identity. A third critique of Merton's lacking a grasp of Confucianism stems from Merton's less than thorough understanding of China's long history. In this insightful and substantive piece, de Bary also points out the irony of Merton's attraction to the Jesuit missionary Matteo Ricci, someone whom de Bary considers to have gotten Confucianism right, while in de Bary's expert opinion, Merton never quite did.

Another interesting piece is Patrick Henry Reardon's "A Many-Storied Monastic: A Critical Memoir of Thomas Merton at Gethsemani Abbey" (*Touchstone* [September/October 2011] 50-57). Reardon, who is now pastor of All Saints Antiochian Orthodox Church in Chicago, was one of the two monks at Gethsemani who recited the psalms for an hour in front of Merton's casket for the repose of his soul before the funeral Mass. In an honest and loving voice Reardon recalls what it was like learning from Merton and living with him for the last thirteen years of Merton's life. Without taking away from Merton's good name, indeed wanting to safeguard it against what he considers popular misinterpretations, he takes issue with both Edward Rice's and Monica Furlong's portrayals of Merton.[10] According to Reardon, Rice's remembrance led readers to the impression that Merton was becoming Buddhist and leaving Catholicism behind and Furlong unjustly portrayed Dom James Fox as a foil undermining rather than serving Merton's spiritual journey. Personally, however, Reardon was drawn to Merton the scholar of the Patristic period, expositor of Catholic monastic and contemplative tradition; he admittedly never appreciated or perhaps understood Merton's "great interest in non-biblical religions." He also admits that, although he was not in material disagreement with Merton's political activism, he "sort of [wishes] Merton had avoided it" (56).

Somewhat contrasting Reardon's wish, in the same journal we have

10. Edward Rice, *The Man in the Sycamore Tree: The Good Times and Hard Life of Thomas Merton* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1970) and Monica Furlong, *Merton: A Biography* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1985).

"A Friendship of Letters: On the Correspondence between Thomas Merton and Dorothy Day" by Jim Forest, the peace activist, friend and biographer of both Merton and Dorothy Day (*Touchstone* [September/October 2011] 58-63). This piece is really a three-way conversation because Forest knows his two subjects so intimately and in many ways stands among them. By reviewing letters between these two "icons" of twentieth-century American Catholicism, Forest shows us both Day's iron-clad dedication to unrestricted loving service, and Merton's vacillating temperament, still wondering if he was doing enough, if he was where he ought to be. Day emerges as a trusted confidante with whom Merton can frankly express his vulnerability. There is a refreshing, earthy intimacy in their letters, and Forest helps us feel that we are not strangers to this friendship but somehow belong with them. I should note too that the editors of *U.S. Catholic* also published an "anonymous" interview with Jim Forest about his friendships with both Merton and Day and about the correspondence that is preserved between the latter pair ("Work Hard, Pray Hard," *U.S. Catholic* 76.11 [November 2011] 18-21).

John Dear, SJ stands in communion with the peacefully resistant spirit of Jim Forest, Dorothy Day and Thomas Merton. In many ways he stands on their shoulders. "Thomas Merton and the Wisdom of Non-Violence" (*Benedictines* 64.2 [Fall/Winter 2011] 18-27) is an accessible and profound essay in which Dear shares what he has learned, and what we can learn, from Thomas Merton about non-violence, the Peace of Christ and our duty to become apostles, visionaries and prophets of non-violence. Dear reminds us that if Merton could do so much for peace as a hermit in the woods, on the grounds of a cloistered monastery, those of us on the outside need to do what we can where we are, and Merton is a trustworthy guide for us.

In "Thomas Merton: A Study in Twentieth-Century Ambiguity" (*American Benedictine Review* 62.1 [2011] 103-11), Dominic Milroy, OSB offers a penetrating and honest reflection on the messy contradictions that raged within this creative genius. Milroy's piece was adapted from a talk he presented at a meeting of the Chevetogne Group, an informal group comprised of roughly twenty European monastic superiors, and the topic of the meeting was "fatherhood." Milroy was intrigued by the awkward distrust that characterized Merton's 1961 meeting with Fr. Jean Leclercq, who told Merton he was "a pessimist, too anxious and too negative" (104). From this beginning, Milroy examines a number of ambiguities in Merton's life, and sees them partly rooted in the fact that Merton was first an existentialist orphan, in search of a trustworthy ground, but always suspicious of authority. Milroy suggests that Leclercq's distrust

of Merton stemmed from the fact that the former took for granted his whole life the benevolent fatherhood of God and the trustworthiness of superiors who reflected that. Milroy explores many facets here, but the deepest ambiguity he explores that Merton faced was the doubt about whether Merton really was a monk, or whether he was a journalist posing as a monk in order to write about the experiment. This essay shuns no question, and Milroy ends with an insightful comment and an interesting, albeit rhetorical question: "If he had a stronger sense of filial submission and of stability, he might have had fewer problems. But would he have been so creative?" (111).

The final piece to be considered in this essay gives Merton the last word. David M. Odorisio received a Shannon Fellowship in 2008 that provided him the support necessary to do the archival work that stands behind his article, "Thomas Merton's Novitiate Conferences on Philoxenos of Mabbug (April-June 1965): Philoxenos on the Foundations of the Spiritual Life and the Recovery of Simplicity" (*Hugoye: Journal of Syriac Studies* 13.2 [2010] 251-71). There are thirteen recorded conferences that Merton had given on Philoxenos and Odorisio's article publishes selections from four of these. The selections are preceded by an introduction by Odorisio that helps the reader locate the intersection of Merton's interest in Philoxenos and his interest in Zen. Merton's facility with connecting the wisdom of this desert father with the stories of Zen masters comes through in these conferences with humorous levity yet without ever losing a serious centeredness. The reader has the delightful experience of listening to Merton the teacher, of watching him point his finger, and trying to follow the pointing to the target Merton intends. As usual, the target Merton intends is humility, simplicity and an attendant singular focus on the divine Word speaking – the calm eye hidden and shining at the center of our often stormy lives.[11]

11. I wish to thank Melissa Sissen, Research Librarian at Siena Heights University, and Nathan Woods, Student Assistant to the Religious Studies Department, for their cheerful help in acquiring most of the materials reviewed in this essay.