

is limited to a select few (and usually paired with other problematic positions such as the evilness of the body), Merton claims, that Gnosticism becomes heretical. Likewise, for Clement, “Gnosticism equals mystical contemplation” (30). Similarly, regarding the controversial figure of Origen, Merton writes that his understanding of martyrdom consists of the “idea of union with the Logos through union in love and suffering with Christ, the Word Incarnate” and that this is “the most fundamental idea in all Christian mystical theology” (38). Though I have only included examples from one lecture, Merton’s concern for tradition runs through the book, and it points contemplatives to a foundation that can both keep them from falling into error and serve as a resource as they explore the mystical tradition of the Church.

The final aspect of this book I wish to mention in this review is the additional material that follows Merton’s thirteen lectures – an identification of texts that are relevant to the lectures themselves and questions designed to guide group discussions of the lectures. Both of these sections can help readers as they pursue greater understanding of Christian mysticism. As mentioned previously, Merton hoped that these lectures could inspire others to further study, and by supplying both sources and lines of questioning the editor puts readers in a better position to do so than if they relied on the lectures alone.

In summary, this book can be useful in two ways. First, it can provide the reader with directions for further study. It is not (and does not claim to be) a comprehensive course on Christian mysticism, but it does a good job of presenting an introduction to the theologies of important figures in the tradition that can be used as a springboard into further study and reflection. Secondly, it gives a window into the mind of Merton. His charity and appreciation for the Christian tradition are evident throughout and thus may be of use to Merton scholars as well as those interested in mysticism in general. Its only limitation is that it represents only a small selection of Merton’s work on Christian mysticism and is thus broad, but not very deep. Overall, however, its benefits outweigh its shortcomings, and I recommend this book to those interested in both Merton and Christian mysticism in general.

Ian Bell

MERTON, Thomas and Ernesto Cardenal, *From the Monastery to the World: The Letters of Thomas Merton and Ernesto Cardenal*, translated and edited by Jessie Sandoval with notes and translations by Jeffrey Neilson and Introduction by Robert Hass (Berkeley, CA: Counterpoint, 2017), pp. xxx + 321. ISBN 978-1-61902-901-9 (cloth) \$30.00.

When Ernesto Cardenal became a novice at the Abbey of Gethsemani in 1957, he was surprised to discover that Father Louis, aka Thomas Merton, was to be his novice master and further surprised that when they met as novice and master for what Cardenal termed “spiritual guidance,” Merton was full of questions “about Nicaragua, Somoza, the poets of Nicaragua, the Nicaraguan countryside, poets from other parts of Latin America, other dictators.” Cardenal remembers that Merton would talk about poet friends, his life before entering the monastery, and his days at Columbia University. What the new novice took away from their conversations was a very important lesson: “at first I thought I’d have to renounce everything when I entered the Trappist order – my books, my interest in my country, in politics and the dictatorship of Latin America, in Nicaraguan politics, in Somoza, in everything. And Merton made me see that I did not have to renounce anything.”<sup>1</sup> When Cardenal left the monastery novitiate two years later, the two men would begin a correspondence and, in the process, grow a friendship that continued for almost a decade until Merton’s death in 1968. The two had much in common. To begin, both were poets with wide-ranging interests in literature, history, religion, politics and indigenous cultures. Most importantly, they shared a passion for a contemplative life, a hunger for justice and a sense of solidarity with peoples struggling for freedom.

*From the Monastery to the World* celebrates the Cardenal–Merton friendship. This handsome edition of their correspondence is the product of a collaborative effort by Jessie Sandoval, translator and editor; Jeffrey Neilson, who contributed notes and translations; and Robert Hass, author of the Introduction. The book references and builds on previously published work including *The Courage for Truth: Letters to Writers*,<sup>2</sup> which included forty-eight letters of Merton to Cardenal; *Witness to Freedom: Letters in Times of Crisis*,<sup>3</sup> which included two additional letters of Merton to Cardenal; “Time of Transition: A Selection of Letters from the Earliest Correspondence of Thomas Merton and Ernesto Cardenal”<sup>4</sup> – thirteen

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1. Paul Wilkes, ed., *Merton by Those Who Knew Him Best* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1984) 36.

2. Thomas Merton, *The Courage for Truth: Letters to Writers*, ed. Christine M. Bochen (New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 1993) 110-63; subsequent references will be cited as “CT” parenthetically in the text.

3. Thomas Merton, *Witness to Freedom: Letters in Times of Crisis*, ed. William H. Shannon (New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 1994) 207-209, 227-28; subsequent references will be cited as “WF” parenthetically in the text.

4. “Time of Transition: A Selection of Letters from the Earliest Correspondence of Thomas Merton and Ernesto Cardenal,” ed. Christine M. Bochen with translations by Roberto S. Goizueta, *The Merton Annual* 8 (1995) 162-200.

letters exchanged between Merton and Cardenal between August 1959 and December 1959; and *Del Monasterio al Mundo*, a Spanish-language collection of the letters exchanged by the two men.<sup>5</sup> In addition to the letters, this comprehensive volume contains an Introduction; a Translator's Afterword; an Appendix consisting of a "Chronology and Landscape"; Merton's translation of selected poems from Cardenal's *Gethsemani, KY*; a substantial excerpt from Merton's essay "A Letter to Pablo Antonio Cuadra concerning Giants"; "Notes to the Text"; and an Index.

Readers – those familiar with the lives and writings of Merton and Cardenal and those new to either or both – will enjoy an exquisitely crafted Introduction (vii-xxx) by poet and essayist Robert Hass who seamlessly integrates the stories of Cardenal and Merton, highlighting the deep resonances between the two. Weaving together, with exceptional skill and grace, the lives and thought of Merton and Cardenal, Hass brings dimension, texture and insight to our understanding of both men – the monk compelled to speak out against war and injustice and the priest-poet who joined a revolution to overthrow the Somoza dictatorship.

In the "Translator's Afterword" (247-52), editor and translator Jessie Sandoval strikes a personal note as she explains how working on this book stirred memories of her own early childhood in Nicaragua. Members of Sandoval's family experienced firsthand the complexity of the social and political landscape of Nicaragua and the events leading up to the "indiscriminate carnage" (249) of the civil war in the late 1970s. The letters resonated with Sandoval on many levels:

not only because they are historical documents – offering anecdotes and references about noteworthy literary, artistic, and political figures of this era of great turmoil and resistance and, essentially, a poetic fleshing out of political events, leading up to Nicaragua's Sandinista Revolution – but also because as we read deeper, into each letter, these dates, timelines, names, and grand political ideas slowly give way to the immediate preoccupations of daily life and the quotidian struggle of finding meaning, purpose, and love. (249-50)

The Cardenal–Merton correspondence began in August 1959 and ended in July 1968 just a few months before Merton's trip to Asia and his death in Thailand on December 10, 1968. The volume includes thirty-eight letters by Cardenal and fifty-four by Merton in addition to two letters – one to Archbishop Paul Philippe and another to Pope Paul VI (both undated

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5. *Del Monasterio al Mundo: Correspondencia entre Ernesto Cardenal y Thomas Merton (1959-1968)*, ed. Santiago Daydi-Tolson (Santiago de Chile: Editorial Cuatro Proprio, 1998).

and unsent by Merton) which Merton wrote to express his support for the contemplative foundation which Cardenal was establishing in Nicaragua as well as his willingness to live there as a monk if his superiors saw fit.<sup>6</sup> In this time of fast-paced, indeed instant communication, it is a delight to read a correspondence that reminds us of the value of a slow-paced exchange over a period of years. It has been more than twenty-five years since I edited Merton's letters to Cardenal for *The Courage for Truth*. I am struck now, as I was then, by what the letters reveal about Merton, and now, in this exchange of letters, about Cardenal as well. I am moved by the grace and witness of the friendship that envelopes the whole range of their lives – as poets and writers, as persons engaged in a struggle for justice and peace, as people of prayer well acquainted with the depths of silence, as prophets committed to speaking truth.

The Cardenal–Merton letters enable us to glimpse an exchange between two working writers. By 1958, when their correspondence began, both Cardenal and Merton were deeply immersed in the craft of writing. Ten years earlier Merton's best-selling autobiography, *The Seven Storey Mountain*, had brought him to national and international attention. Subsequent publications established him as a pre-eminent – if not yet *the* pre-eminent – American spiritual writer. Before entering the monastery, Cardenal not only edited a volume of new Nicaraguan poets but was already establishing himself as one of those poets. Their correspondence not only reveals their prodigious outputs but also lets us in on the nitty-gritty work of dealing with publishers, managing translations and international contracts, and, in Merton's case, negotiating the challenges of censorship.

Among the many important themes that emerge in these letters, I want to highlight three interrelated themes: vocation, speaking truth in times of crisis and the recovery of unity.

Vocation – both in the religious sense and in the broader sense of a calling to writing as a life's work – is a prominent concern throughout the letters. Writing to Cardenal soon after he left the novitiate for reasons of health, Merton reminded his former novice that he should not regard leaving Gethsemani “as the end of your vocation, or as a break in the progress of your soul toward God. On the contrary, it is an entirely

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6. It is worth noting that Merton's willingness to go Nicaragua at this time lacks the unbridled enthusiasm Merton manifested in 1959 when he requested an indult that would permit him to go Mexico. The letters to Archbishop Philippe and Pope Paul were written in October 1965. At this time, Merton was settling into his life in the hermitage. In a letter to Cardenal, dated October 22, 1965, Merton mentions that he will write a letter to Archbishop Philippe, which Cardenal can send him “to show that I am in full accord with your project.” This letter is not reprinted in *From the Monastery to the World*. (For the text of this letter, see *WF* 227-28).

necessary step and is part of the vital evolution of your vocation” (15). Merton affirmed Cardenal’s vocation even as he recognized its uniqueness: “You certainly have a vocation, but not necessarily a conventional type of vocation” (49). Urging patience, Merton continued to encourage Cardenal throughout his seminary studies and ordination, and afterward, as Cardenal founded a small community at Solentino. Merton knew well that vocations evolved and required continual discernment. During the early years of their correspondence, Merton himself was grappling with a desire for ever greater solitude that, in 1959, led him to apply for an indult which would enable him to join Cardenal in Mexico to live there as a monk. The indult was denied, but in the years that followed Merton would experience the solitude he sought in a hermitage on the grounds of the monastery. In August 1965, he was granted permission to live in the hermitage full-time. Nevertheless, he continued to scope out possible places where he might experience deeper solitude as, in the last year of his life, he traveled to Alaska, California, New Mexico and finally to Asia.

Merton came to see writing as an important element of his vocation as monk and he viewed Cardenal’s writing as a calling as well. Both Merton and Cardenal realized that speaking out in truth was a moral obligation and a necessity, particularly in times of crisis when “everywhere violence threatens” (224). Writing in the midst of the social upheaval in North and South America, Merton offered both analysis and prescription:

Basically our first duty today is to human truth in its existential reality, and this sooner or later brings us into confrontation with system and power, which seek to overwhelm truth for the sake of particular interests, perhaps rationalized as ideals. Sooner or later this human duty presents itself in a form of crisis that cannot be evaded. At such a time it is very good, almost essential, to have at one’s side others with a similar determination, and one can then be guided by a common inspiration and a communion in truth. Here true strength can be found. (224)

Merton found such “a communion in truth” with Cardenal and the host of Latin American writers with whom Merton felt deep kinship and a closer bond than he generally felt with North American writers. Merton and Cardenal rejoiced in the promise of a new generation of poets and felt keenly the responsibility of encouraging young poets. In the midst of an “ongoing bad political situation” in Nicaragua, Cardenal sensed “an admirable spiritual fecundity.” The country was “producing many young poets” and Cardenal believed that he and his friends, José Coronel Urtecho and Pablo Antonio Cuadra, were creating “an apostolate among

them” (130). Merton viewed the new poets with hope: “this movement of poets and artists toward a new spiritual consciousness is certainly the most hopeful thing that I have seen in the world lately” (160).<sup>7</sup>

Merton’s sense of urgency to speak out in a time of crisis is apparent throughout the correspondence as he describes himself as “deeply concerned about peace” (84) and his intensifying distress at the “enormous war machine” (96) and the growing “state of madness” (107) – themes to which Merton returns again and again in his mimeographed collection of Cold War Letters, written between October 1961 and October 1962. When Merton shared these letters and his anti-war writings with him, Cardenal was deeply moved: “my own anguish has been especially great after reading the Cold War Letters and this book [*Breakthrough to Peace*], books which have made me more aware of the horror that the world is continually headed toward with ever increasing speed – and too few are conscious of this” (115).<sup>8</sup> Cardenal reported that in Latin America, the

majority tend to have a simplistic mindset, or they have either placed their faith in Russia or in the United States. Furthermore, there also exists the sheer sense of impotence: that the world’s destiny is in the hands of the two giants, that the rest of the countries are merely nothing more than spectators who applaud one or the other. Let us hope that *Breakthrough to Peace* is translated into Spanish; it will guide many minds, as will your other writings on this horrible subject. (115-16)<sup>9</sup>

Writing in November 1962, Merton’s view of “politics and the world situation” was dire: “the world is full of great criminals with enormous power, and they are in a death struggle with each other. It is a huge gang battle, of supremely well-armed and well-organized gangsters, using well-meaning lawyers and policemen and clergymen as their front, controlling papers, means of communication, and enrolling everybody in their armies” (122). Yet, in the midst of all, “we must . . . be joyful and simple because we do not after all understand most of it. . . . But let us avoid false optimism,

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7. See “Message to Poets,” a piece that Merton wrote for a gathering of Latin American poets meeting in Mexico in 1964 (Thomas Merton, *Raids on the Unspeakable* [New York: New Directions, 1966] 155-61).

8. Writing this letter in November 1962, Cardenal must be referring to the first mimeographed edition of the “Cold War Letters” consisting of forty-nine letters, which was completed in April 1962. Merton completed the expanded mimeographed edition of one hundred and eleven letters in April 1963. For a published edition of the letters, see Thomas Merton, *Cold War Letters*, ed. Christine M. Bochen and William H. Shannon (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2006).

9. See the excerpt from “A Letter to Pablo Antonio Cuadra concerning Giants” reprinted in *From the Monastery to World* (267-75) and the note on page 280.

and approved gestures. And seek truth” (122). Before signing off, Merton adds a haunting question: “Who will civilize North America? That is the big question, and perhaps it is being asked too late” (123).

Mindful of pervasive division and violence, abuse of power and tyrannical dictatorships, discrimination and racism, Merton and Cardenal envisioned and hoped for a world in which unity would prevail. “Someday America (North, Central, and South),” Merton wrote, “will perhaps be the great living unity that it was meant to be and that it now is not” (144). Merton saw Cardenal’s research into and writing about indigenous peoples in Latin America, including the Kogi Indians of Colombia and the Cuna Indians of San Blas, as “something far deeper than *indigenismo* with a political – or religious – hook inside the bait.” It is “a profound spiritual witness” and “a reparation, and a deep adoration of the Creator, an act of humility and love which the whole race of the Christian conquerors has been putting off and neglecting for centuries” (119). Galvanized by their culture and traditions, Cardenal committed himself to be “a defender of those spiritualities” of the Indians he was coming to know (156). Cardenal was grateful to Merton for inspiring this aspect of his vocation: “I owe you for my ability to begin to understand and love the Indians, and most of all for being able to see in them the religious and spiritual values that I did not see before. And that almost no one here in Latin America ever sees” (151-52). Merton himself wrote essays on Indians in North and in Central America, four of which he published in the *Catholic Worker* in 1967 and 1968. These essays and one other were published posthumously in *Ishi Means Man: Essays on Native Americans*.<sup>10</sup> Their shared interest in and concern for indigenous peoples was just one dimension of a commitment to overcoming division and recovering, as Merton would put it in a talk he gave just weeks before he died, the “original unity” of humankind.<sup>11</sup>

The pieces included in the Appendix are welcome additions to the volume. Readers will appreciate the “Chronology and Landscape” (255-59) which sets the lives of Cardenal and Merton within the religious and political context that includes the founding figures of liberation theology, including Gustavo Gutiérrez, Leonardo Boff and Juan Luis Segundo, as well as the ministry of Jorge Mario Bergoglio who, in 2013, was to become Pope Francis. Although constraints of space certainly necessitated a broad-stroke approach, it is unfortunate that references to Merton end with the writing of “Letter to Pablo Antonio Cuadra concerning Giants”

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10. Thomas Merton, *Ishi Means Man: Essays on Native Americans*, ed. Teo Savory (Greensboro, NC: Unicorn Press, 1976).

11. Thomas Merton, *The Asian Journal*, ed. Naomi Burton Stone, Brother Patrick Hart and James Laughlin (New York: New Directions, 1973) 308.

in 1961. The omission of Merton's death in 1968 is an oversight, as is the posthumous publication of Merton's *Ishi Means Man*.

I am grateful for the inclusion of Merton's translations of poems from Cardenal's collection, *Gethsemani, KY* (261-65). Soon after he left the monastery, Cardenal sent Merton "some poems about Gethsemani" (24). Merton found them "very effective . . . . The simplest ones are the best – for instance the little song 'Hay un rumor de tractores . . . ' and the other one about the smell of the earth in the spring in Nicaragua, and the ones that bring to mind contrasts and comparisons with Nicaragua" (28). Merton noted the arrival of the published book of poems in his journal with more fulsome comments: "Small, bare, but warm poems, austere annotations, like Haiku, one of the most elementally simple . . . . His allusions to Nicaragua, to the train by the lake of Managua, to the steamboat Victoria that sank – give them a special quality. But they do not need this reference to be already very personal, pure and sacred. The religious ones are often the most simple and direct of all. Simplicity = Sacredness."<sup>12</sup> In 1963, Merton wrote to tell Cardenal that he was including translations of twelve of the poems and "Three Epigrams" in his forthcoming *Emblems of a Season of Fury*.<sup>13</sup> The inclusion of Merton's translations of Cardenal's poems in *From the Monastery to the World* serves to highlight something of Cardenal's unique experience of Gethsemani as well as Merton's efforts to make available to English-speaking readers the powerful poetry of his friend Ernesto as well as that of other poets from Central and South America.<sup>14</sup>

Readers will also appreciate the inclusion of a substantial portion of Merton's essay "A Letter to Pablo Antonio Cuadra concerning Giants." First published in English in *Blackfriars* in February 1962 and, in a Spanish translation by José Coronel Urtecho, in *El Pez y la Serpiente* in Managua in March 1962, the essay appeared, along with Merton's translations of Cardenal's Gethsemani poems, in *Emblems of a Season of Fury* (ESF 70-89). Together with Merton's two "found poems" – his

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12. Ernesto Cardenal, *Gethsemani, KY* (Mexico: Ediciones Ecuador, 1960). For the journal entry written on June 12, 1960, see Thomas Merton, *Turning Toward the World: The Pivotal Years. Journals, vol. 4: 1960-1963*, ed. Victor A. Kramer (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1996) 10.

13. Thomas Merton, *Emblems of a Season of Fury* (New York: New Directions, 1963) 114-24; subsequent references will be cited as "ESF" parenthetically in the text.

14. In addition to translating twelve of Cardenal's poems and three of his Epigrams and including all fifteen pieces in *Emblems of a Season of Fury*, Merton translated the poems of Pablo Antonio Cuadra, Jorge Carrera Andrade, César Vallejo and Alfonso Cortés. For Merton's letters to Cuadra and Cortés and a host of Central and South American poets and writers, see *CT* 164-243.



Auschwitz poem, “Chant to Be Used in Processions around a Site with Furnaces” (*ESF* 43-47), and his poem about the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, *Original Child Bomb*,<sup>15</sup> Merton’s “Letter” to Cuadra marked the beginning of Merton’s protest against the Cold War and the proliferation of nuclear weapons. Convinced that war was the most urgent issue facing the world, Merton published a flurry of anti-war essays and articles until he was forbidden by his order to publish any more on the topic. Merton explained to Cuadra that the piece really is “an article . . . and the giants in question are of course the big power blocs that are beginning to enter the final stages of the death struggle in which they will tear each other to pieces” (*CT* 189). Merton portrays the two superpowers, the Soviet Union and the United States, as Gog and Magog, a reference to Revelation 20:8. Placing his hope in the “Third World,” Merton nevertheless issues a warning:

I would say that if Gog and Magog are to destroy one another, which they seem quite anxious to do, it would be a great pity if the survivors in the “Third World” attempted to reproduce their collective alienation, horror, and insanity, and thus build up another corrupt world to be destroyed by another war. To the whole third world I would say there is one lesson to be learned from the present situation, one lesson of the greatest urgency: be unlike the giants, Gog and Magog. Mark what they do, and act differently. (273)

The final piece in the Appendix is “Notes to the Text” (277-307). With a few changes, the notes are taken from Santiago Daydi-Tolson’s *Del Monasterio al Mundo*. The subject and size of the notes vary from basic bibliographical information to lengthier entries that provide helpful background information.

Apart from irksome typos, *From the Monastery to the World* is a rich and enjoyable read and a timely one as well. Sadly, the social problems facing us today are not so different from those facing Cardenal and Merton more than a half-century ago. Violence, the abuse of power, the threat of war, the arms race and racism are with us still, but so is the faith and hope that sustained Merton and Cardenal. In his last letter to Cardenal, written on July 21, 1968, Merton wrote: “I have a very definite feeling that a new horizon is opening up and I do not quite know what it is” (241). In the light of Merton’s death just a few months later, the words have a prescient ring. Indeed, “a new horizon” opened up for Merton. In these letters, as in their lives and writings, Ernesto Cardenal and Thomas Merton point us

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15. Thomas Merton, *Original Child Bomb: Points for Meditation to Be Scratched on the Walls of a Cave* (New York: New Directions, 1962).

toward a new horizon – here and now. Many thanks to Jessie Sandoval, Jeffrey Neilson and Robert Hass for bringing us this important book.

Christine M. Bochen

CHAUTARD, Jean-Baptiste, OCSO, *The Spirit of Simplicity*, translated with notes and appendix by Thomas Merton, OCSO, edited by Elias Dietz, OCSO (Notre Dame, IN: Ave Maria Press, 2017), pp. xviii + 139. ISBN: 978-1594717819 (paper) \$15.95.

The early twentieth century saw a flowering of Cistercian writing. Dom Vital Lehodey published three influential works on ascetical mysticism. Jean-Baptiste Chautard wrote a book entitled (in English) *The Soul of the Apostolate*,<sup>1</sup> which went through several editions and many printings, and which was endorsed by Pope St. Pius X as his bedside reading. The flowering continued on this side of the Atlantic with the popular writings of Fr. Raymond Flanagan, and of course, Thomas Merton, both of the Abbey of Gethsemani. In more recent years, such names as André Louf, Basil Pennington, Thomas Keating and others have joined their ranks.

Two of these authors, Chautard and Merton, combined, though not contemporaneously, to produce a little work self-published by the Abbey of Gethsemani in 1948 called *The Spirit of Simplicity*.<sup>2</sup> This book has now been republished by Ave Maria Press, edited and with a preface by Fr. Elias Dietz, OCSO, the current abbot of Gethsemani.

Fr. Elias delves into the origins of the book in his informative preface. Chautard was given the task of writing a pamphlet in preparation for the General Chapter of 1925 of the OCR (later the Order of the Cistercians of the Strict Observance [OCSO]). The Order had only officially been formed thirty-three years earlier, in 1892, and this General Chapter was looking to the Order's past to point a way to its future. The pamphlet was circulated, and Dom Frederic Dunne, Abbot of Gethsemani, saw it as a way to publicize the Cistercians in the United States. He set a young monk of his, Louis Merton, to translate it. This was before the appearance

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1. Thomas Merton was the (anonymous) translator of this volume: Jean-Baptiste Chautard, *The Soul of the Apostolate*, translated by a Monk of Our Lady of Gethsemani (Trappist, KY: Abbey of Gethsemani, 1946); this replaced an earlier translation first made in 1912, published in 1927, and reissued by Gethsemani in 1941. In a later paperback edition of the book (Garden City, NY: Doubleday Image, 1961), Merton was identified as the translator and provided a revised, expanded introduction.

2. *The Spirit of Simplicity Characteristic of the Cistercian Order. An Official Report, demanded and approved by the General Chapter. Together with Texts from St. Bernard of Clairvaux on Interior Simplicity. Translation and Commentary by A Cistercian Monk of Our Lady of Gethsemani* (Trappist, KY: Abbey of Gethsemani, 1948).