

Merton appreciated the danger of “either/ or” thinking and acting because he had first confronted it in himself. He knew from his own experience that issues of justice and peace often hold a tangled snare of contradictions whose possible implications might easily become a trap of inconsistencies, both intellectually and spiritually. Merton recognized in his true identity that the only way out of this maze was to contact the deepest reality present in his heart. This reality opened him to a love that was the grounding force of unity with all which undergirded all differences. In my view, Merton challenges us today to integrate this type of spirituality because it is so needed in the ministry of witness and works for peace and justice, where it is very easy to take a position “against” or “for” and lose a sense of connection with other persons involved who may disagree or simply not understand. Merton knew that for such crucial challenges as peace and justice, a more authentic spirituality was demanded, one which sought a “both/ and” inclusive attitude of mind and heart without which we may find ourselves on the alienated, self-righteous extremes, both in our own hearts and in relation to others.

Merton’s openness to diversity in people and their heartfelt response to him exemplifies the truth that, on the level of the heart, we can become one. Therefore, any personal efforts that we make in attaining an attitude in our hearts which stretches to include a space for those with whom we differ in any way become means to attaining the marvelous communal unity which will occur under the Reign of God where we will all meet in heart, spirit, and mind. This Reign, that Merton so ardently desired and enjoyed in his own life, is a “tease” for the life which is to come.

The Meeting was a “tease” for me. I still miss my teacher. The early Christians found the challenge to live the message of their Teacher difficult because they were preoccupied with mourning someone who gave life meaning for them. I mourn the loss of Merton’s presence as a companion on this earth’s journey who gave meaning to the struggles for peace and justice. I mourn his loss also because his life was a sign of hope for me that persons of extremely diverse opinions on the most serious issues could be united through the power of love. It is my desire that, by the time I meet him at the banquet table of the Reign of God, my heart will be expansive enough to enjoy the widely divergent assortment of guests who are there!

MERTON-FLIRTIN’

by **Stephen Drane**

He had a twinkle
in his eye —
not a stye —
seldom wry.

He had a way
with words
and phrases —
hyberbole —
levels, phases.

This man a monk?
You must be crazy!
Well, at least
a little dazey.

Lovin’ Thomas,
makin’ rhyme —
joyous, joking,
arts sublime . . .
some pastime!