

power and sanctity of the Spirit of God.¹²

Conclusion

Each reader of the “Merton text” must decide the degree of success Merton achieved in this great monastic endeavor. Thomas Merton has helped me to understand that the monk is in a singular position to represent the formal doctrines of the Roman Catholic Church while at the same time bearing within himself the sufferings of those unable to believe. As a celibate whose life is consecrated to Christ, the monk can serve as focus for the yearnings of the human heart and the spiritual strivings of those who cannot identify with institutional Christianity, whatever their situation in life.

We monks hold in balance within us a Christianity of paradoxes and polarities. We are both ancient and at the frontiers of the Church in today’s world. Himself a “moral parallax,” the monk is able to view the sin and the sinner from two perspectives, to speak out clearly against the first (for the world needs our challenge) and to respond with love to the second (for the world sorely needs our compassion). For me as monk, to do this is only to be in harmony with myself.

12. Thomas Merton, *The Monastic Journey*; ed. by Brother Patrick Hart (Garden City, New York: Doubleday Image Books, 1977): pp. 62-117; *passim*. For an analysis and interpretation of Merton’s Christology, see my essay “The Christ of Thomas Merton’s *Monastic Peace*,” *Cistercian Studies* 24:3 (1989): pp. 264-274.

THREE POEMS IN THE SPIRIT OF *LOGRAIRE & CABLES TO THE ACE*

If the following poems are only indirectly related to Thomas Merton, their spirit certainly reflects his inspiration. At first glance, we may fail to see how blues poems about Hank Williams, Jr., and Bob Dylan convey some form of monastic experience. In fact, these poems and “Dark Friends of Jesus” prove how diverse my own “monastic” connections have become under what I truly believe are the promptings of the Holy Spirit.

“Feels Just Like the Hank Williams, Jr., Blues Again” reflects the concerns of a young “blue collar” worker who stands in symbolic relation to his culture. I write it wearing his mask. “Ain’t This Bob Dylan’s Blues Again” is my own response to him and his work environment. Significantly, he and his friends, upon first reading it, identified with the poem as an expression of themselves, not knowing it was my self portrait. From generation to generation, the message is the same: pain wears no mask.

“Dark Friends of Jesus” was begun on the morning of 25 June 1989 and completed five minutes before the start of a Mass of Healing for persons whose lives have been touched by AIDS, 4:00 p.m., Shrine of the Immaculate Conception, Atlanta, Georgia. Read as a meditation after Communion, the poem links all of us with these persons who in their prophetic way stand in symbolic relation to our age and our Church.

The gift of association with all of these friends, somehow uniting within myself their very divergent social ways and moral views, is but one indication of the mystery and the richness of monastic vocation. In emptying ourselves, we monks too receive the “hundred fold” promised by Our Lord.

I

“Feels Just Like the Hank Williams, Jr., Blues Again

1. Proud of my Bandit all blue and shiny chrome.
Proud of those ½ million candles on its dome.
It's what Hank drives. Why not me?
2. Carry my liquor tucked in my belt.
Rattlesnake band on my hat of black felt.
Think Hank looks tough? Don't mess with me!
3. Wear my jeans tight and wear my boots tall.
Wear white on dates most of all.
Think Hank dazzles? Girls, take a look at me!
4. Not ashamed to call people what they are.
Not ashamed for tryin' to set the world on fire.
Hank's the greatest thing goin', after me!
5. Give a damn about people wherever I go.
Please don't ask me to tell them so.
Hank's not “sensitive.” Certainly not me!
6. Now even monks come for spiritual chats.
Don't have time for things like that.
Hank's got the answers. Question him, not me!
7. Can't handle all this stuff called “LIFE.”
Hard workin'. Not sleepin'. Women who want to be my wife.
Must be how Hank feels? He's a lot like me.
8. Goin' on twenty-one and feel almost forty-two.
Agin' fast from all of you.
Oh, Hank, please pull me through!

“Ain’t This Bob Dylan’s Blues Again?”

1. Loopin’ across the Parkway off Exit 78
Spinnin’ my wheels through the gate
Playin’ a game of chance with time and fate
Ain’t this Bob Dylan’s blues again?
2. Turn off the radio and turn on the smile
March through the door like a soldier on file
Or crawl like a criminal on his way to trial
Ain’t this Bob Dylan’s blues again?
3. Cast glances at those cashier girls
Nod to bruisers openin’ cans with their nails
Dodge rowdies swingin’ from the ceiling rails
Ain’t this Bob Dylan’s blues again?
4. Try to think up somethin’ that’s cute
Throw words around like bullets that shoot
Ask questions like pirates diggin’ for loot
Ain’t this Bob Dylan’s blues again?
5. Turn conversations into duels of illusion
Scramble the sequence to add some confusion
Falsely apologize for calculated intrusions
Ain’t this Bob Dylan’s blues again?
6. Make a pretense of fun by bein’ serious
Hide the emptiness by bein’ mysterious
Joke with ease while feelin’ furious
Ain’t this Bob Dylan’s blues again?
7. Pull skulls from imaginary top hats
Watch cadavers rise from freezer vats
See phantoms swirl over electric mats
Ain’t this Bob Dylan’s blues again?
8. Hear pained infants weep like the night’s rain
Pass out vest pocket poems from a curious brain
Slip away fast like the next movin’ train
Ain’t this Bob Dylan’s blues again?
9. Circlin’ back home at a dangerous rate
Wonderin’ whether I’m feelin’ small or great
Knowin’ all along I’m Delusion’s mate
Ain’t this Bob Dylan’s blues again?
10. A cloud of dust settles over my head
Part of me’s alive and part of me’s dead
An angel sleeps with a demon in my bed
Ain’t this Bob Dylan’s blues again?

III

Dark Friends of Jesus *

Remember so sweet in our childhood, lovely, veiled
Sister pleading: "Never forget Jesus' words, "Follow thou Me!"
How handsome Father from his black pompomed biretta pulled
holy cards inscribed in gold filigree: "Always an 'Alter Christus' be!"
But those girlish ears and boyish eyes were doubly deaf and blind:
in glorious innocence, and ignorance of the impending years;
of how becoming "another Christ" takes more than being kind,
takes terror and torment and courage through the tears.
Sister knew, Father knew, and we, each in the silence of our hearts;
silver wings and rubied crowns befit a child's faith.
One only is the Lord, soaked in blood, his hat a cap of thorns,
and we need do nothing 'cept say "Yes" when he calls us to be his friends.
Whatever our past, whatever our present, whatever be our pain:
We are all dark friends of Jesus, each known to Him by name.

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