

# FIRST OF THE LAST?: THE PUBLICATION OF MERTON'S "PERSONAL JOURNALS" AND THE DEATH OF A FRIEND

by **Robert E. Daggy**

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I am frequently asked what I think might have happened if Thomas Merton had had a word processor. As director of the Merton Center, repository for his literary estate, I wince at the idea. What he left without access to a personal computer is incredible. Whether he filled journals and notebooks by hand or pounded out books, essays and letters on a manual typewriter, Thomas Merton produced an astounding amount of "paper." Had he had a p.c., had he turned out floppy discs and printouts, we might have even more Merton "works" than we have. Even though he had no computer, other people do and Merton books continue, twenty-seven years after his death, to appear with amazing regularity. Over 130 titles now stand on my office shelves. One of the most recent of these, of course, is the first volume of his long awaited and so-called "personal journals": *Run to the Mountain: The Story of a Vocation/ The Journals of Thomas Merton, Volume One, 1939-1941*, edited by Patrick Hart, OCSO. [Note also the four recent translations of Merton works cited in the "Recent Publications" section.]

I am frequently asked another question. Is there an end to what Merton wrote? There is no seeming end to materials. Letters, reading and lecture notes, taped lectures and other items remain unpublished. Much of this material (most of it?) should probably remain unpublished. I am reminded of a reviewer who remarked about another collection of Merton essays (one that I happened to edit) that we would next be seeing publication of Merton's laundry lists. The irony here is that one does not have to suspend much belief to imagine such a publication. Merton himself, however, left instructions that his "personal journals" were to be published twenty-five years after his death, thus opening the "last" restricted materials in the Merton corpus.

Merton is still a "popular" writer, a writer for a commercial market (as the publishers think) in which readers do not want to be burdened with much beyond the basic text. Certainly that is reflected in the several collections edited and published since his death, most of them (including the five volumes of *The Merton Letters*) minimally edited and some of them (most obviously *The Collected Poems*) not really edited at all.

The journals as they will be published in this series, for better or for worse, are no different. Restrictions put on the editors by the trade publishers, HarperSanFrancisco, mean that they are being edited to make them as readable as possible with a minimum of editing and commentary. As John Loudon, Senior Religion Editor at HarperSanFrancisco, told the six editors: "The Journals should not resemble German doctoral dissertations!" The versions now being published are the "raw journals," just as Merton wrote them by hand in large ledger-style notebooks. They show us Merton working and thinking. In this issue, we feature four "redactions" which have recently come to light in the so-called *Brown Journal*, as well as a "review symposium" with commentaries on *Run to the Mountain* by Arthur W. Biddle, Jack Kelly, and Paul J. Spaeth.

Merton had a number of "special friends" during his lifetime. In his later years he had no closer nor more loyal friend than W. H. "Ping" Ferry, "Grand Old Man" of the first three General Meetings of the ITMS. He called us all, including himself, "Mertoniacs." Ping's distinctive walk (what he called his "shuffle") always announced his arrival. At the Third General Meeting at Colorado College, I heard Ping walking before I saw him and I knew that he was there. Then he appeared: ratty old fishing hat pulled down on his head and beat-up Nikes on his feet — no pretense, no guile, no "agenda," no fanfare — just Ping. Two vivid memories remain with me from that Meeting. I sat with Ping during John Wu's Keynote Address. He dozed through most of it, but as applause broke at the end, he woke up, turned to me and said: "Great talk, Daggy, great talk. That one's got to be published. Great talk!" He confessed that he thought he was getting a bit forgetful. As I let him out one night in front of his dormitory, he asked me what his room number was. I said: "One, Ping." Without turning around, he answered: "I can remember One! See you tomorrow." Ping Ferry said of Merton that his death left a hole in the lives of many that could never be filled. I repeat his words in 1995 for Ping Ferry's death leaves a hole in my life and in the lives of many Mertoniacs that can never be filled. We feature an "Appreciation" by Gregory J. Ryan.

Note especially in this issue the Schedule for the First General Meeting of The Thomas Merton Society of Great Britain and Ireland, as well as the "Call for Papers" for the Fifth General Meeting of the ITMS to be held at Spring Hill College in Mobile, Alabama, in 1997.