

# Sowing Seeds of Contemplation and Compassion: Merton's Emerging Social Consciousness

By **Christine M. Bochen**

Our helplessness to read and understand the Signs of the Times. It is not comfortable to realize that we are now the ones who have eyes to see and do not see, ears to hear and do not hear.<sup>1</sup>

## Introduction

Like other spiritual masters of the twentieth century – such as Mahatma Gandhi, the Dalai Lama, and Thich Nhat Hanh – Thomas Merton was attentive to “the signs of the times.” This attention grew out of an ever-deepening social consciousness, which was nurtured in and through a life of contemplative prayer and which moved the monk and writer to bear witness to the integral relationship between contemplation and compassion, between spirituality and work for justice and peace. While strikingly apparent in Merton’s writings during the sixties, this social consciousness is already in evidence in his earlier writings. Seeds of social awareness and responsibility were taking root well before Merton’s “turn toward the world” in the late fifties – a turning symbolized by the epiphany at Fourth and Walnut in 1958 and expressed in the urgency with which he began to speak out against war in 1961.

We have only to look at *The Seven Storey Mountain*, Merton’s best-selling autobiography published in 1948, to discover a young man beginning to confront the social issues of his day. Even as he recounts the inner journey that led him to become a Catholic and a Trappist monk, Merton reveals an awareness of the brokenness of a world torn apart by violence, injustice, poverty and, most particularly, war. In the memorable opening lines of *The Seven Storey Mountain*, Merton paints a vivid and disturbing picture of the world and his predicament in it. His own interior turmoil mirrors that of the world into which he is born in 1915: “Free by nature, in the image of God, I was nevertheless the prisoner of my own violence and my own selfishness, in the image of the world into which I was born. . . . Not many hundreds of miles away from the house where I was born, they were picking up the

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men who rotted in the rainy ditches among the dead horses and the ruined seventy-fives, in a forest of trees without branches along the river Marne.”<sup>22</sup> As his autobiography nears its end, another world war exacts a personal toll with the death of his brother, John Paul (*SSM* 401-404). In the intervening pages, Merton not only reveals a growing dis-ease with the realities of poverty and injustice but also wrestles with his stand on war. His decision that, if drafted to serve in World War II, he would only do so as a non-combatant foreshadows his vehement anti-war stand during the sixties (*SSM* 311-13).

While Merton’s decision to enter a monastery in 1941 signals a resolve to leave the world behind, the world and its tribulations continued to claim his attention during the forties. Even as a young monk writing about contemplative experience, Merton reveals an awareness of the world outside the monastery – an awareness which comes through in *Seeds of Contemplation*,<sup>3</sup> the book that he would revise, expand and publish in 1961 as *New Seeds of Contemplation*,<sup>4</sup> undoubtedly his most widely read writing on spirituality. Nevertheless, *Seeds of Contemplation* continues to merit attention. In it, Merton expresses ideas, however inchoately, that motivate and inform his future writings on social issues.

*Seeds* and *New Seeds* have garnered the close attention of Merton scholars, most particularly Donald Grayston, whose meticulous study of five versions of *Seeds* led him to conclude that *Seeds of Contemplation* and *New Seeds of Contemplation* may be “considered as one organic whole”<sup>25</sup> that reflects “Merton’s development as a Christian contemplative and spiritual theologian over a dozen years or so” (Grayston, *Development* 11). Grayston observes that his textual study demonstrates “the way in which Merton, who in 1948 was essentially a world-denying and triumphalist monk, a contemplative-out-of-the-world, had by 1961 become a world-affirming and broadly ecumenical person, a contemplative-at-the-heart-of-the-world” (Grayston, *Development* 12). Donald Grayston accents the narrowness of Merton’s early worldview and warns readers of *Seeds* that they “will find no real social or even domestic piety, little for ‘the world’ but the contempt of an author who is glad to have escaped it, and the implication that the thoughtful (male) reader, who pursues the book’s argument to the end and agrees with it, will do well to make the logical response and join the author in his monastery.”<sup>26</sup> Grayston concludes his discussion of *Seeds of Contemplation* with these observations:

Only a brief chapter on war and another on tradition and revolution in the church (Chapters 9 and 12) seem to contain the germs (‘seeds’!) of a piety, which could grow into a social spirituality. Otherwise, beyond the incidental mention of newspapers and radios (v1 60) or subways (v1 61) or the names of Hitler and Napoleon (v1 76), the book could have been written in the late sixteenth century, and be read as a statement of the intense, obediential, and individual piety of the counter-reformation. (Grayston, “Making” 342)

The persuasiveness of Donald Grayston’s reading of *Seeds* notwithstanding, I would like to suggest that there is a value in reading of *Seeds of Contemplation* with an accent on the continuity rather than the discontinuity between *Seeds* and *New Seeds*. To do so we need not necessarily set aside the longstanding and valid distinction between the “early” and the “late” Merton. Like many readers and scholars of Merton, I have long found the distinction helpful in considering Merton’s life and work. The “early” Merton is the new convert who embraces Roman Catholicism with triumphant enthusiasm, turns away from the world, becomes a Trappist monk, and writes about spiritual subjects like prayer and contemplation. The “later” Merton turns toward the world, sees

himself implicated in its struggles, and speaks out on social issues like war and racism. The “early” Merton is something of a recluse; the “later,” something of a prophet. Thomas Merton himself contrasts these “two Mertons” in an essay called, “Is the World a Problem?” First, he sketches a picture – or perhaps, more accurately stated, a caricature – of the “early” Merton that grew out of *The Seven Storey Mountain*: “due to a book I wrote thirty years ago, I have myself become a sort of stereotype of the world-denying contemplative – the man who spurned New York, spat on Chicago, and tromped on Louisville, heading for the woods with Thoreau in one pocket, John of the Cross in another, and holding the Bible open at the Apocalypse.”<sup>7</sup> This is a picture of “the monk with his hood up and his back to the camera” (*CWA* 144). Then, Merton describes the “later” Merton, who is the author of the essay, as “a self-questioning human person who, like all his brothers, struggles to cope with turbulent, mysterious, demanding, exciting, frustrating, confused existence in which almost nothing is really predictable, in which most definitions, explanations and justifications become incredible even before they are uttered, in which people suffer together and are sometimes utterly beautiful, at other times impossibly pathetic” (*CWA* 144). Surely, the contrast Merton himself draws between the “early” and “later” is striking. Yet, while acknowledging the reality of change in his life, Merton certainly recognized the continuity that characterized his life. For example, in January, 1964 as he was approaching his fiftieth birthday and jubilee year, he wrote in his journal about the “need for constant self-revision, growth, leaving behind, renunciation of yesterday, yet in continuity with all yesterdays.” Explaining, he writes: “My ideas are always changing, always moving around one center, always seeing the center from somewhere else.”<sup>8</sup> It is with an eye to the elements of continuity and consistency in Merton’s life and work that I turn to *Seeds of Contemplation*.

### Reading and Rereading *Seeds of Contemplation*

Thomas Merton began writing *Seeds* in 1947, under the working title of “The Soil and the Seeds of Contemplation.”<sup>9</sup> He dated the book complete on July 1, 1948 and on September 13, he noted that the book was “finally off to the printer.”<sup>10</sup> In the “Author’s Note,” Merton characterizes *Seeds of Contemplation* as “nothing more than a collection of notes and personal reflections” about “the interior life” and “contemplation that springs from the love of God” (*SC* 13), insisting that the book “has no other end or ideal in view than what should be the ordinary fulfillment of the Christian life of grace, and therefore everything that is said here can be applied to anyone, not only in the monastery but also in the world” (*SC* 15). He received the published copy of *Seeds of Contemplation* on March 5, 1949 – three days after its official publication date. Though he was pleased by the “very handsome” appearance of the book – bound in a burlap cloth cover which Jay Laughlin likened to what was being used “on the walls of night clubs,” Merton’s journal entry on March 6, 1949 reveals his misgivings about the book as he observes that it “lacks warmth and human affection” and is “cold and cerebral” (*ES* 287). The arrival of *Seeds* brought on “an immense examination of conscience” and stirred some doubts about its value and its author.

Every book that comes out under my name is a new problem. . . . Every book I write is a mirror of my own character and conscience. I always open the final printed job with a faint hope of finding myself agreeable, and I never do. . . . I find in myself an underlying pride and contempt for other men that I had thought was

all gone, and it is still there, as bad as ever. I don't see how the book will ever do any good. It will antagonize people, or else make them go around acting superior and stepping on everybody. (ES 287)

Yet, a few months later, in July 1949, Merton seemed pleased when the book was being read in the Chapter Room and admitted that he was “glad the book has been written and read,” adding that he had now “said enough about the business of darkness and about the ‘experimental contact with God in obscurity.’” He went on to report that Jay Laughlin had sent him reviews of the book and to note that there were three kinds of reviews. In the first kind, the majority, “the reviewer merely copies the publisher’s blurb on the jacket.” In the second, the reviewer “registers an emotional reaction, the fruit of some vague impulse, good or bad.” The third kind of review is written by reviewers who “really have something to say about the book. Such reviews,” Merton observes, “are rare.” He adds that he is “getting the impression that a number of priests are hostile to the book. The terminology is unfamiliar to most of them and some of the statements are, by their standards, careless. . . . In any case I’ll try to do some revision on the book next month” (ES 333). A revised version of the book was published in its seventh printing on December 19, 1949.

This revision is intriguing for several reasons. First, it was done so quickly – the revised version was published just nine months after the initial publication of the book. Second, the revision appears not to have been prompted by reviews of *Seeds*. Reviews most critical of *Seeds* appeared after the publication of the revised version. Finally, the revised edition of *Seeds* appears to have gone by unnoticed and unreviewed. This is not surprising given that there is no mention of the revision on the cover, the title page or the reverse of the title page. Only the inclusion of a new preface signals that there is something new about the book.

In addition to slight changes in organization – Chapter 13, “Through a Glass” is divided at p. 100 and the subsequent rewritten pages become Chapter 14, “*Electa ut Sol*” and the following chapters are renumbered<sup>11</sup> – Merton added a “Preface to the Revised Edition” in which he advised the reader that he had made “a few minor corrections”<sup>12</sup> and offered a warning to read slowly, not jump to conclusions and to remember that “the author is talking about spiritual things from the point of view of experience rather than in the concise terms of dogmatic theology or of metaphysics” (SC [rev.] xii). Donald Grayston also notes more than one hundred and fifty textual changes, observing that Merton omitted some repetitive passages, made some smaller emendations and added some new material.<sup>13</sup>

The revision that appears most significant to Merton himself was the deletion of a sentence that continued to cause Merton embarrassment and shame years after he wrote it. In *Seeds*, Merton had written: “For outside the *magisterium* directly guided by the Spirit of God we find no such contemplation and no such union with Him – only the void of nirvana or the feeble intellectual light of Platonic idealism, or the sensual dreams of the Sufis” (SC 87). More than a decade later he confessed to his Muslim friend Abdul Aziz:

As to *Seeds of Contemplation*, the reason why I have not added this to the others is, frankly, shame. The book was written when I was much younger and contains many foolish statements, but one of the most foolish reflects an altogether stupid ignorance of Sufism. This I have many times regretted, now that I know much

better what it is, but I could not bring myself to send you a book containing such a lamentable error. . . . If there is to be any further edition of the book I shall have the error corrected and then you will receive the book.<sup>14</sup>

One wonders why Merton did not simply send Aziz a copy of the revised *Seeds* in which he had removed the offending passage. Perhaps he did not have a copy available, or perhaps Merton recognized that, given the numerous printings of *Seeds* that had been published and its translation into at least thirteen languages, there was no recalling the original version of the book. A month after he had written this letter to Aziz, on December 31, 1960, Merton notes in his journal that he is “rewriting *Seeds of Contemplation*.”<sup>15</sup>

Nevertheless, when Merton assessed his own books, he included *Seeds* (as well as *New Seeds*) among the books that he considered his “better” writing,<sup>16</sup> along with several other books from what he termed his first period of writing: *The Seven Storey Mountain*, *The Sign of Jonas* and *Thirty Poems*.<sup>17</sup>

### Intimations of Social Consciousness

In *Seeds of Contemplation*, Thomas Merton attempted to map out the inner terrain of the spirit as he sought to talk about the human person’s experience of God in contemplation. As he had explained in the “Preface to the Revised Edition,” he was “talking about spiritual things from the point of view of experience rather than in the concise terms of dogmatic theology or of metaphysics” (*SC* [rev.] xii). Experience was not only enriching his understanding of contemplation but also deepening his grasp of what the contemplative life demanded of him. “One of the greatest paradoxes of the mystical life,” as Merton was beginning to see, “is this: that *a man cannot enter into the deepest center of himself and pass through that center into God, unless he is able to pass entirely out of himself and empty himself and give himself to other people in the purity of a selfless love*” (*SC* 47). This passage expresses an insight and mystery that Merton would plumb for years to come as he experienced contemplation flowering into compassion. Intimations of Merton’s emerging social consciousness are especially apparent in what Merton has to say in *Seeds of Contemplation* about the world, the self, and the human community.

#### The World

While Merton exhorts his readers to deliver themselves “from the desires and the cares and the interests of an existence in time and in the world,” he also celebrates its God-given beauty and its capacity to mirror God’s very reality. Merton’s admonishments are strident:

Do everything you can to avoid the amusements and the noise and the business of men. Keep as far away as you can from the places where they gather to cheat and insult one another, to exploit one another, to laugh at one another, or to mock one another with their false gestures of friendship. Do not read their newspapers, if you can help it. Be glad if you can keep beyond the reach of their radios. Do not bother with their unearthly songs or their intolerable concerns for the way their bodies look and feel.

Do not smoke their cigarettes or drink the things they drink or share their preoccupation with different kinds of food. Do not complicate your life by looking at the pictures in their magazines. (*SC* 60-61)<sup>18</sup>

Reading these lines, one wonders what audience Merton had in mind; the message seems more appropriate for novices than the more inclusive audience he mentions in the “Author’s Note” as he writes that “the kind of considerations written in these pages ought to be something for which everybody, and not only monks, would have a great hunger in our time” (SC 13).

However, this apparently world-denying attitude contrasts sharply with the opening pages of *Seeds* in which Merton celebrates the world as a sacrament of God’s love with lyrical prose.

For it is God’s love that warms me in the sun and God’s love that sends the cold rain. It is God’s love that feeds me the bread I eat and God that feeds me also by hunger and fasting. It is the love of God that sends the winter days when I am cold and sick, and the hot summer when I labor and my clothes are full of sweat: but it is God Who breathes on me with light winds off the river and in the breezes out of the wood. His love spreads the shade of the sycamore over my head and sends the water-boy along the edge of the wheatfield with a bucket from the spring, while the laborers are resting and the mules stand under the tree.

It is God’s love that speaks to me in the birds and streams but also behind the clamor of the city God speaks to me in His judgments, and all these things are seeds sent to me from His will. (SC 18)

This sacramental vision of the world, as a symbol and mode of God’s presence, is summed up in the titles of Chapter 1, “Everything that is, is Holy” (SC 20), and Chapter 2, “Things in their Identity” (SC 24). The world is God’s creation and all that is gives glory to God by being what it is. You may recall these memorable lines: “A tree gives glory to God first of all by being a tree. . . . The more it is like itself, the more it is like Him” (SC 24). It is in being what it is, that each being gives glory to God and it is in the identity of things and persons that holiness is to be found: “The special clumsy beauty of this particular colt on this April day in this field under these clouds is a holiness consecrated to God by His own Art, and it declares the glory of God” as do the “pale flowers of the dogwood,” the leaf with “its own texture and its own pattern of veins and its own holy shape” and “the great, gashed, half-naked mountain” (SC 25). All are God’s saints.

What does Merton see when he speaks of “the world” in *Seeds*? He sees at least two dimensions: the world as God’s creation, manifesting God’s presence, and the world as dark and full of temptation. Asking himself what world Christ meant when he said “that His disciples were in it but not of it,” Merton writes: “The world is the unquiet city of those who live for themselves and are therefore divided against one another in a struggle that cannot end, for it will go on eternally in hell. It is the city of those who are fighting for possession of limited things and for the monopoly of goods and pleasures that cannot be shared by all” (SC 57). But you cannot escape this world “merely by leaving the city and hiding yourself in solitude” because “you will only take the city with you into solitude. . . . For the flight from the world is nothing else but the flight from selfishness” (SC 57).<sup>19</sup> The “world” then is the not simply a place but a way of being, a false way of being – a way of being which Merton names the false self.

## The Self

“Every one of us is shadowed by an illusory person: a false self” (SC 28), Merton writes in *Seeds* as he introduces a distinction that is central to his theological anthropology: the distinction he makes between the false self and the true self – a distinction which he develops at greater length in *New Seeds* and in *The Inner Experience*.<sup>20</sup> Merton introduces the phrase “the false self” in Chapter 2 of *Seeds*, “Things in their Identity.” Unlike the tree which “gives glory to God first of all by being a tree,” humans are different (SC 24). Inanimate things, animals, flowers, all nature are holy because they are what they are meant to be. “Their inscape is their sanctity” (SC 25). It is not so with humans. “God leaves us free to be whatever we like. . . . *The seeds that are planted in my liberty at every moment, by God’s will, are the seeds of my own identity, my own reality, my own happiness, my own sanctity*” (SC 26-27). Refusing my own identity and my very own self, I fail to become what God intends me to be. This refusal is a consequence of sin. “To say I was born in sin is to say I came into the world with a false self” (SC 27). Merton continues: “All sin starts from the assumption that my false self, the self that exists only in my egocentric desires, is the fundamental reality of life to which everything else in the universe is ordered” (SC 28).

Merton offers his readers a host of synonyms and adjectives to describe the false self. The false self is “an illusory person” that shadows each of us, “unknown of God,” a “private self,” “hollow” (SC 28-29), a fiction, “the illusion that is opposed to God’s reality living within me,” “the person that God does not know,” “self-centered” (SC 34). Although Merton does not use the term “true self” in *Seeds* as he will in *New Seeds*, he sketches a picture of the true self which involves “being real,” becoming a saint, realizing one’s true identity, the secret of which “is hidden in the love and mercy of God” (SC 29). Merton explains that we “become contemplatives when God discovers Himself in us” (SC 32). This discovery of self that coincides with God’s discovery of us leads to the discovery of others and our responsibilities toward them.

## The Human Community

“We are One Man,” Merton asserts in the title of Chapter 4 (SC 38). Critical of those who seek to become real by “cutting themselves off from other people and building a barrier of contrast and distinction between themselves and other men,” Merton observes that those who live like this are “living in death” (SC 38-39). “I must look for my identity, somehow, not only in God but in other men. I will never be able to find myself if I isolate myself from the rest of mankind as if I were a different kind of being” (SC 41-42). A person goes “into the desert not to escape other men but in order to find them in God” (SC 42). To think that you can “find God by barricading yourself inside your own soul, shutting out all external reality by sheer concentration and will-power, cutting yourself off from the world and other men by stuffing yourself inside your own mind and closing the door like a turtle” is “one of the worst illusions.” The reality is simple: “The more I become identified with God, the more will I be identified with all the others who are identified with Him” (SC 47).

These realizations will deepen in the years ahead. Knowing what we do of Merton’s life and writing, we naturally scroll ahead to what we are accustomed to terming Merton’s “turning toward the world.” But the “seeds” of that “turn” are already taking root as is the realization of the brokenness of the human community. We are “A Body of Broken Bones” as Merton suggests in the title of Chapter 5 (SC 53). We are Christ’s body, a body that is broken. “In the whole world, throughout the whole of history, even among religious men and among saints, Christ suffers dismemberment.” Just

as Christ's physical body was crucified, "His mystical Body is drawn and quartered from age to age" (SC 54). Merton evokes a disturbing image of this body of broken bones:

All over the face of the earth the avarice and lust of men breed unceasing divisions among them, and the wounds that tear men from union with one another widen and open out into huge wars. Murder, massacres, revolution, hatred, the slaughter and torture of the bodies and souls of men, the destruction of cities by fire, the starvation of millions, the annihilation of populations and finally the cosmic inhumanity of atomic war: Christ is massacred in His members, torn limb from limb; God is murdered in men. (SC 54)

In the face of this division and "the pain of disunion," we have two choices: hatred or love.

Hatred recoils from the sacrifice and the sorrow that are the price of this resetting of bones. It refuses the pain of reunion. It identifies the agony with the other men whose presence causes agony in us by reminding us of our disunion.

Hatred tries to cure disunion by annihilating those who are not united with us. It seeks peace by the elimination of everybody else but ourselves.

But Love, by its acceptance of the pain of reunion, begins to heal all wounds. (SC 55-56)

Love calls to the work of "the resetting of the Body of broken bones" that is at once the Body of Christ and the body of humankind. Such work is not accomplished without pain.

In Chapter 9, entitled "The Root of War Is Fear" (SC 70-73), Merton begins a reflection on war that he will expand and develop in *New Seeds*. But already in *Seeds*, Merton is clear that fear, mistrust, and hatred cause war.<sup>21</sup> The solution, as Merton sees it, is a spiritual one: teach people "to love and trust God; then they will be able to love the men they cannot trust, and will dare to make peace with them, not trusting in them but in God" (SC 72). Merton challenges common misconceptions about the nature of peace itself. His point is simply that the peace people desire is not peace at all.

To some men peace merely means the liberty to exploit other people without fear of retaliation or interference. To others peace means the freedom to rob one another without interruption. To still others it means the leisure to devour the goods of the earth without being compelled to interrupt their pleasures to feed those whom their greed is starving. And to practically everybody peace simply means the absence of any physical violence that might cast a shadow over lives devoted to the satisfaction of their animal appetites for comfort and pleasure. (SC 72)

Going a step further, Merton challenges his readers to recognize and eradicate the causes of war that lie within: "instead of hating the people you think are warmakers, hate the appetites and the disorder in your own soul, which are the causes of war" (SC 73). Merton will build on these insights into roots of war and the ways in which we trivialize peace in *New Seeds* and in the flurry of articles against war and for peace that he would write in the sixties.



## Beyond *Seeds*

Read in the light of ideas that he was forming in the late forties, Merton's epiphany in the middle of the business district of Louisville in 1958 is the expression and symbol of a gradually deepening vision of shared humanity that was clarifying his understanding of what it meant for him to be a Christian and a monk. Separateness and superiority, he had come to realize, are part of an illusion: "the illusion that by making vows we become a different species of being, pseudoangels, 'spiritual men,' men of interior life, what have you." Merton explains that this experience at Fourth and Walnut "was like waking from a dream of separateness, of spurious self-isolation in a special world, the world of renunciation and supposed holiness." He celebrated the "glorious destiny" of being human: "I have the immense joy of being *man*, a member of a race in which God Himself became incarnate. . . . And if only everybody could realize this! But it cannot be explained. There is no way of telling people that they are all walking around shining like the sun."<sup>22</sup> Merton's experience in Louisville is commonly viewed as a turning point and it is easy to see why. However, it is an experience grounded in a social consciousness that had been emerging over a period of years.

Some six months later, on November 10, 1958, Merton shared his freshly crystallized sense of mission in a letter to Pope John XXIII:

It seems to me that, as a contemplative, I do not need to lock myself into solitude and lose all contact with the rest of the world; rather this poor world has a right to a place in my solitude. It is not enough for me to think of the apostolic value of prayer and penance; I also have to think in terms of a contemplative grasp of the political, intellectual, artistic and social movements in this world – by which I mean a sympathy for the honest aspirations of so many intellectuals everywhere in the world and the terrible problems they have to face. (*HGL* 482)

He tells Pope John that he had been in contact with artists, writers, publishers and poets, including Russian writer Boris Pasternak who had won the Nobel Prize for Literature. Between August and December 1958, Merton was corresponding with French philosopher Jacques Maritain, Nicaraguan writer and publisher Pablo Antonio Cuadra and Polish poet Czeslaw Milosz. Early in 1959, he began a correspondence with Buddhist scholar D. T. Suzuki. We can easily imagine that Merton's outreach to people all over the world would resonate with the Pope who just two months later on January 25, 1959, in a spirit of openness and optimism, called for an ecumenical council to examine the implications of the signs of the times for the Catholic Church and for its relationship with people of faith and no faith and with the world.

By 1961, Merton was ready to sow in earnest the seeds of compassion and justice and peace that had taken such firm root in his heart. Having found a place for the world in his solitude, Merton was ready to begin speaking out and speak out he did – with conviction and determination – against violence, war, discrimination, and racism – building on the insights to which he gave expression in a book on contemplation written more than a decade earlier. The signs of the times were clear: "That I should have been born in 1915, that I should be the contemporary of Auschwitz, Hiroshima, Viet Nam and the Watts riots," Merton wrote in the late sixties, "are things about which I was not first consulted. Yet they are also events in which, whether I like it or not, I am deeply and personally involved" (*CWA* 145). Thomas Merton could not do other than respond as best he knew how.

1. Thomas Merton, *A Search for Solitude: Pursuing the Monk's True Life. Journals, vol. 3: 1952-1960*, ed. Lawrence S. Cunningham (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1996) 133; in this journal entry, dated November 6, 1957, Merton further observes: "What strikes me most is the lack of communication with Russia and what is outside the Russian sphere. Communists and non-Communists. . . . Millions of soldiers with a completely illusory idea of the enemy they are called upon to fight" (134).
2. Thomas Merton, *The Seven Storey Mountain* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1948) 3; subsequent references will be cited as "SSM" parenthetically in the text.
3. Thomas Merton, *Seeds of Contemplation* (New York: New Directions, 1949); subsequent references will be cited as "SC" parenthetically in the text.
4. Thomas Merton, *New Seeds of Contemplation* (New York: New Directions, 1961).
5. Donald Grayston, *Thomas Merton: The Development of a Spiritual Theologian* (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen Press 1985) v; subsequent references will be cited as "Grayston, *Development*" parenthetically in the text. For the variorum of *Seeds* and *New Seeds*, see Donald Grayston, ed., *Thomas Merton's Rewritings: The Five Versions of Seeds/New Seeds of Contemplation as a Key to the Development of His Thought* (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen Press, 1989). Grayston compares five versions: the original typescript, *Seeds*, *Seeds* revised, the amended and amplified typescript, and *New Seeds*. For a detailed discussion of Merton's writings on contemplation, see William H. Shannon, *Thomas Merton's Dark Path: The Inner Experience of a Contemplative* (New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 1982) and *Thomas Merton's Paradise Journey: Writings on Contemplation* (Cincinnati: St. Anthony Messenger Press, 2000).
6. Donald Grayston, "The Making of a Spiritual Classic: Thomas Merton's *Seeds of Contemplation* and *New Seeds of Contemplation*," *Studies in Religion/Sciences Religieuses* [Montreal] 3 (1974) 341; subsequent references will be cited as "Grayston, 'Making'" parenthetically in the text.
7. Thomas Merton, *Contemplation in a World of Action* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1971) 143; subsequent references will be cited as "CWA" parenthetically in the text.
8. 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) 67 [1/25/64].
9. Michael Mott, *The Seven Mountains of Thomas Merton* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1984) 238. Mott cites Merton's letter of February 8, 1948 to James Laughlin (see 603, n. 116). Excerpts of the letter are published in Thomas Merton and James Laughlin, *Selected Letters*, ed. David D. Cooper (New York: Norton, 1997) 30-31.
10. Thomas Merton, *Entering the Silence: Becoming a Monk and Writer. Journals, vol. 2: 1941-1952*, ed. Jonathan Montaldo (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1996) 232; subsequent references will be cited as "ES" parenthetically in the text.
11. See Marquita E. Breit and Robert E. Daggy, *Thomas Merton. A Comprehensive Bibliography* (New York: Garland, 1986) 100; Patricia A. Burton, with Albert Romkema, *More Than Silence: A Bibliography of Thomas Merton* (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 2008) 22.
12. Thomas Merton, *Seeds of Contemplation* [revised edition] (New York: New Directions, 1949) xi; subsequent references will be cited as "SC [rev.]" parenthetically in the text.
13. Grayston categorized the emendations in five headings: severity of attitude, absolutism in tone, the language of personalism, the description of the divine, and the "spiritual put-down" (Grayston, *Development* 99).
14. Thomas Merton, *The Hidden Ground of Love: Letters on Religious Experience and Social Concerns*, ed. William H. Shannon (New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 1985) 44 [11/17/60]; subsequent references will be cited as "HGL" parenthetically in the text.
15. Thomas Merton, *Turning Toward the World: The Pivotal Years. Journals, vol. 4: 1960-1963*, ed. Victor A. Kramer (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1996) 81.
16. In 1967, Merton made a graph evaluating his books. See Thomas Merton, "Honorable Reader": *Reflections on My Work*, ed. Robert E. Daggy (New York: Crossroad, 1989) 150-51.
17. See the June 17, 1968 letter to Sister J. M. in Thomas Merton, *The School of Charity: Letters on Religious Renewal and Spiritual Direction*, ed. Patrick Hart (New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 1990) 384.
18. In the revised *Seeds*, Merton amends and expands the sentence on newspapers: "Do not read their newspapers unless you are really obliged to keep track of what is going on. Newspapers are a penance, not a diversion" (46).
19. Although Merton insists that "physical solitude, exterior silence and real recollection are all morally necessary for anyone who wants to lead a contemplative life . . . they are nothing more than means to an end," which is the love of

God and the love of others. “We do not go into the desert to escape people but to learn how to find them” (SC 57-58). In *New Seeds* he will make the point bluntly in the title of Chapter 8: “Solitude Is Not Separation.”

20. Thomas Merton, *The Inner Experience: Notes on Contemplation*, ed. William H. Shannon (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 2003).
21. The publication of *New Seeds of Contemplation* in 1961 coincided with Merton’s writing about the threat of the Cold War, the dangers of nuclear proliferation, and the need to abolish war. Merton finished reviewing the galleys for *New Seeds* in late September and sent the chapter on war to Dorothy Day for publication in *The Catholic Worker*. “This is a rewriting of the old *Seeds* which preserves practically all the material that was there before and adds a whole lot more. . . . I have just added on at the end a page or two which situate these thoughts in the present crisis. I think it would probably be better if this last part were actually printed at the beginning, as an introduction to the rest” (HGL 140). Merton did not submit these “introductory paragraphs” to the censors though they had approved the chapter as part of *New Seeds*. “The Root of War” was published in the October, 1961 issue. Ideas that had been taking shape in Merton since the forties became part of the public discourse on war.
22. Thomas Merton, *Conjectures of a Guilty Bystander* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1966) 140-41.
23. An earlier version of this essay was presented on April 25, 2010 at the St. Monica-St. George Newman Center, Cincinnati, OH, as part of the “Year with Thomas Merton” series held there.