

successful in that too. But he didn't. His final imitation of Christ was to acquiesce to his vows, to pour himself out in work, and finally to "become obedient unto death," without ever cashing in. That is what gives his work more staying power than that of the average modern guru whose success may be measured in Rolls-Royce limousines. He wrote about kenosis in his life, but as was usual with him, he also incarnated it.

He is still arrestingly present in his writing, turning his gaze toward us to speak so directly that he makes a live connection. He still, uniquely, invokes in others gratuitous acts of creativity (think of the number of poems he has provoked, and the portraits of himself by others, to mention just two examples). It is hard to think of anyone who has had such a generative effect. Thus true to himself, he has become a monk for the ages, renewing his appeal with each generation of new readers, communicating in whatever medium we choose, perennially gifting us with dimensions of ourselves that we may not even have known we possessed, and helping us to become (in his oft-quoted phrase) who we really are.

1. Patricia A. Burton, with Albert Romkema, *More Than Silence: A Bibliography of Thomas Merton* (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 2008).

A Path to Peace – Thomas Merton, Final Integration and Us

By Nass Cannon

In this time of global disunity, conflict and war, Thomas Merton reveals that our communal path to peace relies on our individual integrative growth. He notes:

At the root of all war is fear: not so much the fear men have of one another as the fear they have of *everything*. It is not merely that they do not trust one another; they do not even trust themselves. . . . It is not only our hatred of others that is dangerous but also and above all our hatred of ourselves: particularly that hatred of ourselves which is too deep and too powerful to be consciously faced. For it is this which makes us see our own evil in others and unable to see it in ourselves.¹

"So instead of loving what you think is peace, love other men and love God above all. And 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" (*NSC 122*). "For only love – which means humility – can exorcise the fear that is at the root of all war" (*NSC 119*).



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Addressing this disorder in his soul, Merton's spiritual journey (undertaken not only for himself but us as well) was, in large measure, to realize growth in integration, which meant for him not only union with God and neighbor but also a degree of union with other cultures and religious traditions. Universal

Nass Cannon is a Clinical Professor of Medicine at the University of Alabama and former Chief of Staff at Cooper Green Mercy Hospital in Birmingham, Alabama. He has a particular interest in the writings of Thomas Merton on contemplation and the formation of the contemplative with their implications for integrative medicine.

in outlook, he was “wide open to heaven and earth and closed to no one”² by embracing the totality of personhood – body, mind, soul in union with the Spirit of God – with all of its creative potential as expressed in the humanities and art from varied cultures and spiritual traditions.

His initial breakthrough to Love at the corner of Fourth and Walnut ripened so that toward the end of his life he became a mature lover attaining to “final integration . . . no longer limited by the culture in which he has grown up . . . retaining all that is best and most universal in them . . . giving birth to a fully comprehensive self . . . [which] accepts . . . all mankind.”³ Because we have the capacity to destroy both the earth and civilization, Merton insists, “whereas final . . . integration was, in the past, the privilege of a few, it is now becoming a need and aspiration of mankind as a whole” (*CWA* 216). He suggests that final integration should be a goal of everyone because the wholeness attained also becomes a path to societal peace and unity. For him, the fully integrated person promotes unity and peace among all.



For Merton, the great barrier to integration for individuals is the false self – the love we have for an illusory self, which we project to the world and adore as an idol. He views the false self, the source of our self-hatred, as a series of accretions wound around the nothingness of a lie and invites us to pierce its core through self-knowledge, contemplation and grace. In doing so with the light of faith, we discover our true self, a self in union with the Spirit of God, and a special manifestation of Christ expressed through our individual personhood. We become a unique expression of the “one truth shining out in all its various manifestation” (*CWA* 212), capable of bringing “perspective, liberty and spontaneity into the lives of others [as] a peacemaker” (*CWA* 212).

Merton summons us to find healing for this “disorder in our soul” by embracing the Spirit of God, who will accelerate our own integration and through us propel the integration of our communities. Thus, we may, like him, become a peacemaker, transcending the limitations of our culture and the barriers to peace. If then, a critical mass of peacekeepers be achieved in any epoch, the dawn of a new age may be realized, fulfilling Isaiah’s prophecy: “They shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks: nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more” (Isaiah 2:3-4). Through the mercy of God, may we all begin the journey and make it so.

1. Thomas Merton, *New Seeds of Contemplation* (New York: New Directions, 1961) 112; subsequent references will be cited as “NSC” parenthetically in the text.
2. Thomas Merton, “*Honorable Reader*”: *Reflections on My Work*, ed. Robert E. Daggy (New York: Crossroad, 1989) 112.
3. Thomas Merton, *Contemplation in a World of Action* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1971) 212; subsequent references will be cited as “CWA” parenthetically in the text.