

## 2009 Bibliographic Review Beneath the Habit of Holiness

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*David Joseph Belcastro*

Brother Paul Quenon's volume of poems entitled *Monkswear*<sup>1</sup> reveals that beneath the habit rests a contemplative heart that opens to a world as expansive as the cosmos and as life-affirming as the original moment of creation.

The Hood

a hiding place  
for the head

a portable anonymity

a refuge from  
artificial light

to make time  
slow down

to make ready  
for rain

for the rain that will come.

Under this thin  
black fabric  
I brood long  
slow and steady

a yes,  
an un-  
qualified  
yes

against that day  
that downpour of

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1. Paul Quenon, *Monkswear* (Louisville, KY: Fons Vitae, 2008).

no

no

no

that will surely come  
 Then I will slip  
 my hood back and  
 let my old white head  
 shine with a  
 pure, unqualified

yes.

This *yes* resonated beneath the habit of Thomas Merton. In a letter to Czeslaw Milosz dated February 28, 1959, Merton wrote:

Milosz – life is on our side. The silence and the Cross of which we know are forces that cannot be defeated. In silence and suffering, in the heartbreaking effort to be honest in the midst of dishonesty (most of all our *own* dishonesty), in all these is victory. It is Christ in us who drives us through darkness to a light of which we have no conception and which can only be found by passing through apparent despair. Everything has to be tested: All relationships have to be tried. All loyalties have to pass through fire. Much has to be lost. Much in us has to be killed, even much that is best in us. But Victory is certain. The Resurrection is the only light, and with that light there is no error.<sup>2</sup>

It is this affirmation that Milosz believed readers sought in Merton's writings. In a letter to Merton, Milosz shares his thoughts after reading *The Sign of Jonas*:

I waited for some answers to many theological questions but answers not abstract as in a theological treatise, just on that border between the intellect and our imagination, a border so rarely explored today in religious thinking: we lack an image of the world, ordered by religion . . . . But a reader (I can judge by introspection only) is eager to learn (gradually) what is the image of the world in Thomas Merton. In a period when the

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2. Thomas Merton and Czeslaw Milosz, *Striving towards Being: The Letters of Thomas Merton and Czeslaw Milosz*, ed. Robert Faggen (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1997) 19-20; subsequent references will be cited as "STR" parenthetically in the text.

image accepted by majority is clear: empty Sky, no pity, stone wasteland, life ended by death. I imagine a reader who says: he possessed a secret, he succeeded in solving the puzzle, his world is harmonious, yet in his diary he tells already about sequences while we would be ready to follow him in 5 volumes through a very vision of the world redeemed by Christ. (STB 61-62)

It is this *yes* that is explored and articulated in the articles and books selected for your consideration in this review. Noted here are four primary publications and twenty secondary publications – four books and sixteen articles; twenty-four publications in total that include a critical edition of lectures to novices, several collections of letters, theological and philosophical studies, and numerous inquiries into various areas of interest shared by Merton readers: the contemplative life, environmental concerns, Eastern religions, and the human experience of Eros. All together, the publications, reviews, and your reading of these works constitute the expansion of the monastic walls within which Merton wrote; an expansion that opens all of us to the harmonious world of grace, beauty and wonder discovered by Merton while living the *Rule* of Saint Benedict.

It should perhaps be noted that the year in which these books and articles were published followed the fortieth anniversary of Merton's death. Looking back fifteen years to 1993, we find that *The Merton Annual* commemorated the twenty-fifth anniversary of his passing from this world. Michael Downey, then associate professor of theology at Bellarmine College in Louisville, wrote the bibliographic review essay for that volume. What he said at that time is worth keeping in mind as we continue the work that was begun now over forty years ago.

At the close of the first twenty-five years of Merton studies, it may be appropriate to suggest some of the tasks that yet await us in our common work. Above all else it seems that the most pressing task is to connect the discourse within the circle of Merton studies with the discourse in other fields. We need to make room for a greater variety of voices in our ongoing conversations, even and especially those voices which might seem to interrupt and unsettle commonly held perceptions about Merton the man and the monk. Merton *aficionados* need an *aggiornamento*. The windows need to be opened, new light thrown on the subject, fresh air breathed into our lungs, new blood let flow through our veins. Much of the Merton conversa-

tion is claustrophobic, a bit like "deja vu all over again." A new generation of Merton scholars will have different perspectives and a different task. Their work will not primarily be that of making the literary legacy of Thomas Merton available to an ever widening circle of readers. It is rather more a task of bringing a heightened critical hermeneutic to bear on the life and legacy of one who no doubt will stand up well under the most rigorous constructive critique. What is being suggested here is not that a cadre of insensitive smart allecks try to air Merton's dirty laundry. Rather it is to suggest that if the conversation around Merton is to be brought to a new plateau, a far greater measure of constructive critique is called for.<sup>3</sup>

### Primary Publications

Merton, Thomas. *The Rule of St. Benedict: Initiation into the Monastic Tradition* 4. Edited with an Introduction by Patrick F. O'Connell. Collegeville, MN: Cistercian Publications, 2009, pp. lxi + 291.

Patrick O'Connell has taken on the ambitious project of editing the conferences presented by Thomas Merton during his years as Novice Master from 1955 to 1965. This one focuses, as indicated by the title, on the *Rule* of Saint Benedict. The earlier volumes focused on *Cassian and the Fathers*, *Pre-Benedictine Monasticism*, and *An Introduction to Christian Mysticism*; the fifth volume addresses *Monastic Observances*.<sup>4</sup> Fr. James Conner's review of O'Connell's book that you find in this volume provides an overview of the lectures and the excellent editing and introduction by O'Connell. Perhaps most important to note is the perspective that Fr. Conner brings to these lectures as one who was once assistant novice master under Merton. Fr. Conner points out that Merton does not provide a complete commentary on the *Rule* but rather, as one entrusted with the formation of young monks, directs the novices

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3. Michael Downey, "Critical Turn Ahead!: 1992 in Merton Scholarship and Publication," *The Merton Annual* 6 (1993) 200-201.

4. Thomas Merton, *Cassian and the Fathers: Initiation into the Monastic Tradition*, ed. Patrick F. O'Connell (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 2005); Thomas Merton, *Pre-Benedictine Monasticism: Initiation into the Monastic Tradition* 2, ed. Patrick F. O'Connell (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 2006); Thomas Merton, *An Introduction to Christian Mysticism: Initiation into the Monastic Tradition* 3, ed. Patrick F. O'Connell (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 2008); Thomas Merton, *Monastic Observances: Initiation into the Monastic Tradition* 5, ed. Patrick F. O'Connell (Collegeville, MN: Cistercian Publications, 2010).

to love the *Rule*, to take it into their hearts and to live it. It is this pastoral approach to the *Rule* that makes this book an important text to be read by all who are interested in the monastic life that shaped Merton's vocation as a spiritual master. Here we see him at work and how he was able to take an ancient text and make it come alive in the hearts and lives of those under his care.

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Merton, Thomas. *Compassionate Fire: The Letters of Thomas Merton & Catherine de Hueck Doherty*. Edited with an Introduction and Afterword by Robert A. Wild. Notre Dame, IN: Ave Maria Press, 2009, pp. xiv + 110.

In "Untitled Poem," the second piece in the collection entitled *Eighteen Poems*, Merton shares his experience of the religious life as the unfolding of questions for which there are no answers but only openings. In this poem, he describes theology as a "kind of birthday" with each of us born into a world as a "question for which old answers are not sufficient."<sup>5</sup> The end result of living this question, and all the questions that proceed from it, is the opening of new chapters within our lives. The correspondence between Thomas Merton and Catherine de Hueck Doherty provides insight into those questions that surfaced within Merton that eventually brought him to Gethsemani. As noted by Robert Wild in his introduction to these letters, those questions gravitated around three themes that run throughout the letters: "real poverty, . . . the importance of silence and solitude for the modern world . . . , and writing as an apostolate for the Church" (xi-xii). In addition to these areas of shared concern between Merton and Catherine, Wild raises a fourth. Recalling Merton's comment that he owes much to Catherine, Wild asks, "What exactly did he *owe* her?" (97). This small volume of letters perhaps takes us deeper into the mystery of Merton's formation as a monk in the twentieth century than all the other collections of letters put together. Consequently, we are indebted to Wild for setting before us this correspondence that is ablaze with the compassionate hearts of two who cared for one another.

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5. Thomas Merton, *Eighteen Poems* (New York: New Directions, 1985).

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Merton, Thomas. *A Meeting of Angels: The Correspondence of Thomas Merton with Edward Deming and Faith Andrews*. Edited by Paul M. Pearson. Frankfort, KY: Broadstone Books, 2008, pp. 118.

This is the second of two books edited by Paul Pearson regarding Merton's interest in the Shakers. The first, *Seeking Paradise: The Spirit of the Shakers*, published in 2003,<sup>6</sup> provided for the reader essays, talks and letters in which Merton shares his admiration for and understanding of a community that embodied the simplicity of the Gospel. The book includes photographs by both Merton and Pearson of the Shaker Village of Pleasant Hill in Kentucky. *A Meeting of Angels*, as the complete title indicates, sets before us the letters that were exchanged between Merton and the noted scholar of Shaker life and crafts, Edward Deming Andrews, and, after Edward's death, Merton's correspondence with his wife Faith. This volume also includes a wonderful collection of photographs by Merton at Pleasant Hill.

In this volume of *The Merton Annual* you will find a fine review of this book by a personal friend of the Andrewses. Mario De Pillis' review nicely supplements Pearson's introduction to these letters by providing background information regarding the life and work of Edward and Faith Andrews. Noting the significant cultural differences between the Andrewses and Merton, De Pillis is somewhat puzzled by the friendship. He carefully sorts out the pieces of the puzzle to reveal a friendship that was mutually valued by both the Andrewses and Merton. Consequently, these letters not only provide the reader with new insights into Merton's work on the Shakers, but into Merton's capacity for friendship. As De Pillis points out, Merton was an encouragement to Edward during a difficult time in his life and a consolation to Faith when Edward died.

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Merton, Thomas. *Thomas Merton: A Life in Letters – The Essential Collection*. Selected and edited by William H. Shannon and Christine M. Bochen. San Francisco: HarperOne, 2008, pp. 402.

Twenty-five years ago, the first volume of Merton's letters was published. *The Hidden Ground of Love*, selected and edited by William Shannon, lays out before us letters that addressed religious

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6. Thomas Merton, *Seeking Paradise: The Spirit of the Shakers*, ed. Paul M. Pearson (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2003).

experience and social concerns. By 1994 the project was completed with the fifth volume, *Witness to Freedom*, again selected and edited by Shannon. While these five volumes<sup>7</sup> sit very nicely on a bookshelf, they are too much to carry around; and, perhaps too much for many to take up and read. As we are often reminded by Paul Pearson, there are many more letters, far more than most of us will have time to read. Consequently, William Shannon and Christine Bochen (editor of the fourth volume of letters, *The Courage for Truth*) have compiled a new one-volume edition of selected letters appropriately titled *A Life in Letters*. I say "appropriately" because Merton's correspondence became an art just as Evelyn Waugh had predicted. What kind of art? A living art, a kind of performance art, that engages and involves the reader, whether the original recipient or those of us who come later to the letters. These letters are not essays in disguise or a soliloquy of Merton's private thoughts but rather dialogues between a monk and the world in which he lived, a monk with an incredible capacity for friendship. So, once again, we see that the letters offer more than information about Merton's life, work and thoughts. This new volume, like the lectures to the novices and the individual collections of correspondence noted above, represents the heart and soul of one who understood the value of spiritual friendship and was willing to offer it to anyone who sent him a letter.

### Secondary Publications

Pramuk, Christopher. *Sophia: The Hidden Christ of Thomas Merton*. Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2009, pp. xxx + 322.

In 1994, *The Merton Annual*, then edited by Victor Kramer, included a review symposium of *Ace of Freedoms: Thomas Merton's Christ* by George Kilcourse; those participating were Patrick Eastman, Diana Culbertson, Donald Goergen and Jean-Marc Laporte. In response to the reviews, Kilcourse clarified two primary objectives of his book:

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7. Thomas Merton, *The Hidden Ground of Love: Letters on Religious Experience and Social Concerns*, ed. William H. Shannon (New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 1985); Thomas Merton, *The Road to Joy: Letters to New and Old Friends*, ed. Robert E. Daggy (New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 1989); Thomas Merton, *The School of Charity: Letters on Religious Renewal and Spiritual Direction*, ed. Patrick Hart (New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 1990); Thomas Merton, *The Courage for Truth: Letters to Writers*, ed. Christine M. Bochen (New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 1993); Thomas Merton, *Witness to Freedom: Letters in Times of Crisis*, ed. William H. Shannon (New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 1994).

The reviewers have accurately perceived that I undertook my study of Merton for two major reasons: (1) to situate Merton's sometimes daring reformulations of the Catholic Christian tradition within the context of the developments and changing methods in theology and spirituality studies since Vatican Council II and Merton's death; and (2) to integrate and to discover the underlying sources and influences on Merton's diverse genres and themes, which do not themselves present a system but which, when interpreted systematically, yield an uncanny focus and contemporary insight on what the tradition names as Christ's *kenosis*.<sup>8</sup>

Now some sixteen years later, we publish another review symposium and again a book that focuses on Christology in Merton's life and work. It would be misleading, however, to suggest that Christopher Pramuk's book retraces territory already covered by Kilcourse. As the title of Pramuk's book indicates, he focuses on Sophia as the "unknown and unseen Christ." He does so by tracing "the emergence of Sophia in Merton's life and writings as a Love and a Presence that breaks through into the world, a living symbol and Name through which he encountered the living God and with which he chose, at his poetic and prophetic best, to structure theological discourse" (xxiii). Consequently, the book does not proceed in a linear fashion but "unfolds as a kind of story-shaped Christology, a theology of God retrieved through the life of Merton, but haunted more and more by the mysterious figure of Sophia" (xxiv).

Those invited to review Pramuk's book represent very different perspectives. Edward Kaplan, while greatly admiring Pramuk's interfaith exegesis of Sophia, at first declined the offer, uncertain what he, a Jew, could say regarding a book on Christology. Fortunately for us, Kaplan changed his mind and offers us an excellent reflection on the book with special attention to Abraham Heschel's influence on Merton's Christology. (Kaplan is a Heschel scholar who has clarified for us on more than one occasion the working relationship between Merton and Heschel.) Franciscan friar Daniel Horan approaches the task of reviewing this book with an understanding of Christology in contemporary studies and underscores Pramuk's "construction of an interdisciplinary bridge between theology and other fields" of study such as poetry and literature. Lynn Szabo, editor of *In the Dark Before Dawn: New*

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8. George Kilcourse, "Author's Response," *The Merton Annual* 7 (1994) 221.



*Selected Poems of Thomas Merton* and a scholar of Merton's poetry, focuses in her review, as one might guess, on that interdisciplinary bridge noted by Horan with special attention to the relationship between language, symbol and the ineffable that are at play in Merton's religious imagination that gave shape to his Christology. Before or after reading *Sophia: The Hidden Christ of Thomas Merton*, you will find that the three reviews and Pramuk's response to the reviews will enrich your reading of this fine book.

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Padgett, Barry L. *Professional Morality and Guilty Bystanding: Merton's Conjectures and the Value of Work*. Newcastle upon Tyne, UK: Cambridge Scholars Press, 2009, pp. xii + 142.

This book extends contemplation far beyond the confines of monastic communities and the quiet ambiance of retreat houses to the clamorous workplace where professionals strive to do the "right" thing. Imagine, for a moment, a monk in the boardroom or sitting with a judge in the courtroom or accompanying a doctor on her daily rounds to visit with patients in hospital rooms. I was once asked by the president of a university to be on his team. Puzzled by the invitation, I asked why. He said that they needed a monk at the table (I am not a monk but had spent three months at St. Joseph's Abbey and for some that is enough to make a person a monk . . . I guess). Had I read Padgett's book at that time, I may have better understood the reason for the request. I am not sure if the president understood why a monk would have something to contribute but it probably had something to do with what is offered in this book. Padgett is concerned about the "one-dimensional man" that many of us have become and believes contemplation, as Merton understands it, to be the necessary corrective. Contemplation becomes the means by which a person becomes "multi-dimensional," by which wisdom becomes an essential aspect of how one makes decisions. Padgett, a philosopher with an interest in professional ethics, summarizes for us ethical theories ranging from Aristotle to Sartre in an effort to show how Merton shares aspects of these various traditions but without fitting into one or another. As the author points out, central to Merton's ethics is love – love as understood within the Christian tradition, a love that dispels the illusion of the isolated self to see and experience the essential unity of oneself with others, nature and God. It is such vision as this that provides the wisdom necessary for knowing and doing the "right thing."

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Shaw, Mark. *Beneath the Mask of Holiness: Thomas Merton and the Forbidden Love Affair That Set Him Free*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009, pp. ix + 246.

Mark Shaw's book has caused quite a stir among Merton scholars, as indicated by the critical reviewse of the book, including the one in this volume by Christine Bochen, editor of *Learning to Love*,<sup>9</sup> the sixth volume of Merton's journals, in which his relationship with the young nurse which is the principal subject of this book is chronicled. While criticisms of the book are valid with regard to the lack of attention to details demanded of scholarly works that are intended to cautiously examine a subject, I am even more concerned that an important aspect of Merton's life that deserves careful consideration has been muddled. I lament this situation not only for Merton but for ourselves.

When we consider Merton's life, it is important for us to ask and clarify a question before doing so. Are we interested in him or is it our own lives that we are exploring? Is our relation with Merton not unlike that between patient and therapist, disciple and guru, or student and professor where projection is part of the process of self-discovery? Or does the example of a portrait artist clarify my point even better. An artist once explained to me that portraits are really self-portraits of the artist. If this is true, do our biographies of Merton tell us more about ourselves than about him? The issues that he addressed and of which we take note, are they not our issues? For example, with reference to this book, the deep division between spirituality and sexuality is a significant problem in our world, as noted by Thomas Moore in his book *The Soul of Sex: Cultivating Life as an Act of Love*.<sup>10</sup> As we live our vocations, we are no less burdened by this split than was Merton. And, for this reason, the discussion of his relation with M. and his experience of Eros is most relevant for all of us. As is true regarding other struggles in his monastic life, so also here. Merton endured and from his labor in the vineyard of the Song, he offers us a beautiful essay on purity of heart. Like so many of his other writings on the spiritual life, this one also points us in the right direction:

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9. Thomas Merton, *Learning to Love: Exploring Solitude and Freedom*. *Journals*, vol. 6: 1966-1967, ed. Christine M. Bochen (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1997).

10. Thomas Moore, *The Soul of Sex: Cultivating Life as an Act of Love* (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1999).

The act of sexual love should by its very nature be joyous, unconstrained, alive, leisurely, inventive, and full of a special delight which the lovers have learned by experience to create for one another. There is no more beautiful gift of God than the little secret world of creative love and expression in which two persons who have totally surrendered to each other manifest and celebrate their mutual gift. *It is precisely in this spirit of celebration, gratitude, and joy that true purity is found.* The pure heart is not one that is terrified of eros but one that, with the confidence and abandon of a child of God, accepts this gift as a sacred trust, for sex, too, is one of the talents which Christ has left us to trade with until He returns. Properly understood sexual union is an expression of deep personal love and a means to the deepening, perfecting, and sanctifying of that love.<sup>11</sup>

The focus of our interest should not be M. Nor should it be Merton. The relation between M. and Merton was that of lovers and as is true for all such relationships, it is private matter. The focus of our attention should be on the disconnect within our own lives between spirituality and sexuality and what Merton has to offer us as we strive to rediscover the gift of Eros in our own lives.

### Conference Papers

*The Voice of the Stranger: Three Papers and a Homily from the Seventh General Meeting and Conference of the Thomas Merton Society of Great Britain and Ireland.* Stratton-on-the-Fosse, Somerset, UK: Thomas Merton Society of Great Britain and Ireland, 2008, pp. 58.

It would be difficult and perhaps impossible to say anything more about this short collection of papers and a homily than has been already said by Christopher Pramuk in his fine review printed later in this volume. So, I refer you to his review and turn our attention to an important point noted by Pramuk regarding one of the three papers:

Thurston invites us to go beyond merely celebrating Merton for his courage as an interfaith pioneer, which would cost *us* nothing. Implicitly she invites us, rather, to engage the sources, and forge the friendships, ourselves; that is, to “go and do likewise.” Some fifty years after his first contact with Abdul

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11. Thomas Merton, *Love and Living*, ed. Naomi Burton Stone and Brother Patrick Hart (New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 1979) 117-18.

Aziz, it is sad and telling, if not surprising, that so many of us are still trying to catch up with Merton on this front.

Thanks to the hospitality of Muslims from Turkey, there is an opportunity for all of us to catch up with Merton. An Islamic organization, in an effort to encourage interfaith dialogue and friendships between Jews, Christians and Muslims, offers programs both here in Ohio and around the country. These programs consist of monthly luncheons at which speakers address issues of mutual concern, an annual Abrahamic dinner at which scholars from the three traditions speak on a common topic, and regular trips (all expenses paid except for airfare) to Turkey where dinners in homes with families are arranged. I have had the good fortune to make one of these trips and to enjoy conversations late into the night with Muslims that have become friends and with whom I correspond. The organization behind these opportunities is presently working with the university where I work to organize annual student exchanges. If all goes as planned, I will be taking students to Turkey next academic year in partial fulfillment of a course entitled "Christian-Muslim Dialogue."

There is more. Following 9/11, a local Islamic center was vandalized. The property was sufficiently damaged to prevent any meetings being held there until repairs were made. A Jewish synagogue located not too far from the center invited the Muslims to meet in their building. Because of the hospitality extended by the Jewish community, friendships between Jews and Muslims continue.

One more story may give us reason to believe that many have heeded Thurston's invitation. While in India this past year, I spent the day at a school in Kolkata run by the Sisters of Loreto. In order to receive an education in India, a child must come from a family with sufficient income to pay tuition. This leaves a very large portion of the population uneducated and trapped in poverty. Sister Cyril, who runs the school, said that the sisters were unable to participate in a system that contributes to the suffering of the poor. Consequently, half of the students in their school come from the slums, the streets and the brothels. Students who are regularly enrolled in the school must tutor the students who come off the streets. I sat with two children on the roof of the school. One was from a wealthy family and the other was from the streets. The one tutored the other. One was a Muslim, the other a Hindu – Muslim and Hindu brought together by Christians.

I doubt if these stories are true only for my small corner of the world. Because of a tragic event, many have followed the example of Merton and Abdul Aziz with the hope that the violence that stokes the fires of hatred will be extinguished by the hospitality of those who sit at the same table as friends.

### Journal Articles

*Buddhist-Christian Studies* 28 (2008).

Francis V. Tiso in his editorial (iii-ix) to this volume of *Buddhist-Christian Studies*, writes: "I would like to focus on what I have been discovering about Thomas Merton and Buddhism in this fortieth anniversary year of his untimely death in Bangkok in 1968. Ever since I first discovered this great Trappist monk and literary giant in 1965, he has been my guide in many aspects of life" (iii). While Tiso proceeds to identify Merton's influence on his life, he is curious regarding Merton's influence on Catholic monastics with regard to interreligious relations. Consequently, the inclusion in this journal of Archbishop Rembert Weakland's report on Merton's controversial Bangkok lecture of December 1968 is most significant (91-99). Weakland provides an account that begins with preparations for the meeting and concludes with the interruption of the conference with Merton's death. The report explores the background to Merton's last talk, a talk that left many confused and questioning the choice of topic. The question of why Merton chose the topic of monasticism and Marxism is left unanswered. Where did this topic originate and what was its purpose? One is left with only conjectures and not much more. The inclusion of Christopher Pramuk's article in this journal, however, opens another door for inquiry into Merton's thoughts on interreligious dialogue. "'Something Breaks Through a Little': The Marriage of Zen and Sophia in the Life of Thomas Merton" (67-89) explores the relationship between Zen and Sophia in Merton's life during the late 1950s. Pramuk believes that it was not so much a coincidence as the result of epistemological difficulties with which Merton was struggling in the midst of radically shifting cultural, ecclesial and political horizons during the second half of the twentieth century. What Pramuk presents in this article is more fully developed in his book already noted above and considered in the symposium review published in this volume of *The Merton Annual*.

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*Cithara* 48.1 (November 2008); 48.2 (May 2009).

*Cithara* is a publication of St. Bonaventure University where Merton taught for a short period before entering the Abbey of Gethsemani. On the anniversary of his death, *Cithara* published "Of Manuscripts and Things: The Thomas Merton Archives at St. Bonaventure University" (31-37) by Paul J. Spaeth which provides a detailed account of what one might find relevant to Merton studies at St. Bonaventure in general (the reference to "things") and in particular within their archive. In honor of Merton's legacy, the journal's two issues in volume 48 include a pair of excellent articles. In 48.1, Richard Reilly's "Thomas Merton on the Contemplative Life and Personhood" (22-30) shows how Merton "embrace[d] the necessity of [his] own true nature" in his search for inner wholeness in an age marked by the polarities of secular and sacred to discover a personal identity that "manifests the qualities of naturalness, spontaneity, and joyfulness" (22). Merton's striving is, of course, our striving. The separation of sacred and secular is likewise our problem. And for this reason, we read Merton, not as students preparing to pass an exam, but as persons like Merton striving to discover within our own lives a balance and wholeness that resonates with joy.

In the following issue, Ross Labrie explores in "Thematic Integrity in Thomas Merton's *Conjectures of a Guilty Bystander*" (14-27), what the author describes as Merton's "enlarging consciousness of his own relationship to so-called secular culture" (26). The article concludes:

In order to navigate into this larger space beyond the monastic culture that absorbed him in the 1940s and 1950s, Merton came to accept the necessity for a balanced relationship between contemplation and action, including social dissent. The sections of *Conjectures* are filled with balancing images of night and day, the conscious and the unconscious, Western rationalism and Eastern cosmic awareness. Without leaving the Catholic environment that had nourished him for many years, Merton in *Conjectures* enlarged the meaning of that environment so that the cloistered walls that surrounded him were henceforth, so to speak, full of windows. In this way he could see those to whom he had as a writer always addressed himself just as they could now see the man, much like themselves he hastened to point out, who lived within. (26)

This striving, the striving to discover balance in a world stressed by the contradictions of secular and sacred, Merton endured not simply as a writer who articulated the tensions of secular and sacred, but as a monk who embodied the reconciliation of these opposites.

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*CrossCurrents* 58.4 (December 2008); 59.1 (March 2009).

In his editorial (518-20) for the first of these two issues of *CrossCurrents* commemorating the fortieth anniversary of Merton's death, Victor Kramer presents Merton as a global prophet, believing:

We are only now beginning to understand his amazing legacy. Sometimes I think of him as a Walt Whitman *and* a St. Augustine, or as an Emily Dickinson *and* a Thomas Aquinas. He was a towering intellectual, yet like Herman Melville's Ishmael, a mystical observer. He pondered the globe – its good and evil. His tale is multivalent. What is most significant is that through his writing the whole world became one community. (518)

Kathleen Deignan's "'Love for the Paradise Mystery': Thomas Merton: Contemplative Ecologist" (545-69) demonstrates how Merton's global vision included a concern for environmental issues. As indicated in Deignan's opening paragraph, Merton was an environmentalist before the term was coined:

"Love for the paradise mystery" is a dominant motif woven through all the writings of Thomas Merton – a gossamer thread of mystical insight and prophetic urgency that fastens together the assemblage of his multi-focused literary legacy. Now, forty years after his death, a pentimento pattern of ecological consciousness becomes evident throughout his corpus as its complexity and unity become more transparent with time. (545)

Glenn Crider's "Thomas Merton's Contemplation; Rarefied Emblem of Being Human and Living in Mystery" (592-607) expands the notion of Merton as a global prophet by his "rare combination of ancient, medieval, modern and post-modern sensibilities" (592) in his effort to integrate life into a single whole.

Like his monastic life and work, Merton's best contemplative writing reveals his amazing ability to draw from a variety of Christian and non-Christian sources. Further, as he grew and developed within his monastic community, Merton became

more and more open to the world itself – as a place of mystery and wonder. That openness stems from his desire and successful ability to implement his monastic identity through the use of countless Christian and non-Christian sources. (592)

This volume of *CrossCurrents* ends with “What to Listen For: Merton as Teacher – A Note” (613-15) by Victor A. Kramer and Glenn Crider that demonstrates from lectures shared on Sunday afternoons “Merton’s gift of pulling together what may appear to be disparate ideas” (615) and Merton’s approach to teaching that includes pastoral care.

Before passing on to the next journal, we should stop and take notice in the following issue of *CrossCurrents* of a transcribed tape of a conference by Merton entitled “Prayer and Identity” (7-14). What I find most interesting about this talk is Merton’s emphasis on prayer as breathing that resonates with the Yoga tradition on contemplation and breathing, a tradition well-known to Merton in his reading classical texts such as Patanjali’s *Yoga Sutras*.

Basically, prayer should be as simple as breathing, as simple as living, but when we make a great issue out of prayer it tends to become confusing; it tends to get distorted. It becomes a cause, the great “cause of prayer,” and then it becomes opposed to something else which is not prayer. You get into this break: prayer is something sacred and other things are secular, and you have to keep them apart – and that’s a confusion.

As breathing is neither sacred nor secular – you just breathe – so prayer too should be neither sacred or secular. I do not regard prayer as a specifically sacred activity. It’s *life*; it is our life; it comes from the very ground of our life. (7-8)

This connection of breath with prayer and both breath and prayer with life is an essential aspect of the Yoga tradition that seeks to yoke or connect the various aspects of our lives into one coherent whole. The yogic discipline of breath control is intended to overcome the split between body and mind by bringing the two together into their original state of oneness. Whether Merton has this in mind during the taped lecture is yet to be demonstrated. Whatever may be the case, it is clear that Merton is trying to overcome the Western disconnect between body and soul, prayer and living, contemplation and action.



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*The Merton Journal* 16:1 (Eastertide 2009); 16.2 (Advent 2009).

Gary Hall's "The Fiction of Merton" (10-16), from the Eastertide issue of the journal of the British/Irish Merton Society, fits well into our selection of readings. Once again Merton is shown as a Spiritual Master who enters into a relationship with his readers and through his writings awakens within us the *yes* that affirms life and the presence of God in our lives. Hall points out that Merton went beyond autobiography to "autobiographical theology" in which the human search for and response to God is revealed. While the story begins with Merton's life, it inevitably ends with the reader reflecting on his or her life and discovering with Merton the unfolding of the mystery of Christ within oneself. It is here where the reader's life intersects with Merton's that "something akin to an actual relationship" becomes apparent and one is able to say, "I know Merton." This is something far more than knowing "about Merton." It is a deeper form of knowing, a kind of communion that is found only in silence and solitude. The fiction of Merton draws the reader into "listening to that still, quiet voice within . . . that longs to become incarnate in some outward gesture uniquely their own" (15).

Selected from the following issue of the *Journal* are three fine articles well worth reading. While relatively short, each article could easily provide all that is needed for a long and meandering conversation with friends through the night.

Rowan Williams' "Not Being Serious: Thomas Merton & Karl Barth" (14-22) was a lecture presented to the Thomas Merton Society of Great Britain and Ireland on the fortieth anniversaries of the deaths of Thomas Merton and Karl Barth (both men died on the same day). The Archbishop of Canterbury traces Merton's interest in Barth from his initial reading of the Swiss reformed theologian (that was not very favorable), to later readings when Merton was beginning to understand Barth's theology and recognize that in Barth he found someone with whom he had more in common than he had originally thought. For example, Williams recalls a journal entry from *Dancing in the Water of Life* that reads:

Our very creation itself is a beginning of revelation. Making us in His image, God reveals Himself to us, we are already his words to ourselves! Our very creation itself is a vocation to union with Him and our life, and in the world around us, if we persist in honesty and simplicity, cannot help speaking

of him and of our calling. But the trouble is that there is no "pure" natural traditions and everything gets overlaid with error. Still, there is truth there for those who are still able to seek it, even if they are few. Ought it to be called "theology"? That is a technical question.<sup>12</sup>

Following this quotation, Williams writes:

Our very creation is a vocation. Once again the centrality in Barth's theology of the calling of God as the essence of the creative act is used by Merton to establish what he thinks is a kind of natural theology that avoids the reproach of simply trying to climb from the world to God by a ladder of analogy. Existence itself is a *word*, my being is God's *word* to me. And in that entry, Merton sees this as something quite in tune, not only with Barth, but with Anselm. (18)

In this manner, Williams brings to our attention the ways in which elements of Barth's theology are appropriated by Merton.

Daniel Horan presents "Thomas Merton's Vernacular Franciscan Theology" (26-36) with the hope of expanding the horizon of Merton studies by viewing Merton through the lens of vernacular theology, in particular, vernacular Franciscan theology. As the title suggests, a vernacular theologian speaks to a much larger and broader audience than does an academic theologian. Since his or her audience includes the general public, the language of the vernacular theologian must be, well, vernacular, which Horan points out is generally colloquial and pedestrian in tone. What makes Merton a vernacular *Franciscan* theologian is his way of discussing creation. For example, Horan quotes the following lines from *The Sign of Jonas*:

The birds are all silent now except for some quiet bluebirds.  
The frogs have begun singing their pleasure in all the waters  
and in the warm green places where the sunshine is wonderful.  
Praise Christ, all you living creatures. For Him you and I were  
created. With every breath we love Him. My psalms fulfill your  
dim, unconscious song, O brothers in this wood.<sup>13</sup>

Other connections are noted between Merton and Franciscan spiri-

12. 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) 279.

13. Thomas Merton, *The Sign of Jonas* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1953) 292.

tuality in general and St. Francis of Assisi in particular that further support the thesis of this article: *living* rather than *doing* theology, discovering a theology that is grounded in the lived experience of God, and identification with the poor and oppressed.

Bonnie Thurston's "The Sacrament of Advent: Thomas Merton's Lessons and Carols" (48-55) was first written as a presentation for an Advent series commemorating the fortieth anniversary of Merton's death. In this talk Thurston examines various texts from journal entries, poems and essays written by Merton during the first decade of his monastic profession. Thurston in the tradition of Merton provides not an academic examination of the texts (although her critical attention to the texts is most obvious) but rather a pastoral reflection on the texts that invites the reader to enter the sacrament of Advent and allow Christ to dwell within us and set us free.

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*Horizons* 36:2 (Fall 2009).

At the outset of this survey, I drew our attention to Michael Downey's bibliographic review essay published in *The Merton Annual* eighteen years ago. In that essay, Downey recognizes that a new generation of Merton scholars will eventually emerge with different perspectives and the challenging task of "bringing a heightened critical hermeneutic to bear on the life and legacy" of Thomas Merton. Many of the scholars noted in this essay represent that new generation. This is especially true with regard to Christopher Pramuk, whose article "Apocalypticism in a Catholic Key: Lessons from Thomas Merton" (235-64) is the last to be considered here.

Recognizing that theology cannot on the one hand dismiss popular fascination with the end times and on the other hand ignore the historical urgency of the New Testament, Pramuk explores the apocalyptic tenor of Merton's late writings in order to propose a critical distinction between apocalyptic in an authentically Catholic and analogical mode and other forms of apocalyptic that have long dominated American religious and popular imagination – forms that when invoked promote fear, conflict and violence. By contrast, the apocalyptic event of which Merton speaks and which Pramuk clarifies is not a catastrophic event at the end of time but rather the unveiling of the present moment, the now-time of "tension, pregnancy, and possibility upon which the history of divine-human freedom ever hinges" (238).

### Conclusion

The correspondence between Merton and Catherine de Hueck Doherty echoes with Merton's earliest inquiries into his religious vocation. Initially obscure, each letter unveiled the secret of his life until at last he found his place with the Trappists. But the unveiling did not end there. Living under the *Rule* of Saint Benedict, a life with God that demanded much of his humanity, he faithfully endured the monastic disciplines that purified him, body and soul. From his labors, he has left us a rich legacy of lectures, correspondence, essays, *and* a community that continues to work out of his vocation, unveiling and revealing the mysterious work of God not only in Merton but in us. The unveiling continues, the unveiling of our own vocations, those who continue to be engaged by the Spiritual Master who has offered us in his writings a friendship of "Deep affection and solidarity in Christ" (*STB* 20) wherein we may discover that affirming *yes* hidden beneath the habit of holiness.

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