

providence”—the book you need to read falls into your hands at just the right moment of your needing to read it. Who knows the good that a small volume like *Precious Thoughts* will do?

In discerning the value of all the Merton secondary literature (all of it selected perspectives—it could all be called “fabricated”) the market for really useful secondary paths into Merton’s mind will eventually sift out the wheat from the chaff. Unlike Thomas Merton’s original books, some of which appear to bear indefinite expiration dates, the secondary literature is mostly destined for no-longer-in-print oblivion (although James Finley, whose *Merton’s Palace of Nowhere* is headed for its thirtieth anniversary in print, can rightly chuckle at this assertion⁶).

“Without contact with living examples, we soon get lost or give out. We need to be sustained in the interior work that we alone can do, with God’s grace: but still there is need of the push that comes from others who do the same, and who can, in the briefest signals, communicate some of their directions to us” (141 [27 November]). Gardner’s *Precious Thoughts*, her compilation of brief “signals,” provided by one always pushing forward through all his experiences to find his identity with all his relations “in Christ,” will provide “push” and direction for those who choose to linger over her selected texts. Is her compilation further evidence of the continued “blossoming” of Merton Studies, if one can use that word, or is her book yet another epiphany of unwanted weeds in the garden? Who am I to judge? I can only report that, on most pages of this new “fabrication,” this Merton-reading old dog was re-enchanted enough to stop and sniff the roses.

Jonathan Montaldo

MERTON, Thomas, *Thomas Merton on Contemplation* (Introduction by Fr. Anthony Ciorra + 5 Lectures: 4 CDs); *Finding True Meaning and Beauty* (4 Lectures: 2 CDs); *Thomas Merton’s Great Sermons* (Introduction by Fr. Anthony Ciorra + 4 Lectures: 2 CDs); *Vatican II: The Sacred Liturgy and the Religious Life* (7 Lectures: 4 CDs); *Thomas Merton on Sufism* (Introduction by Fr. Anthony Ciorra + 13 Lectures: 7 CDs); *Ways of Prayer: A Desert Father’s Wisdom* (Introduction by Fr. Anthony Ciorra + 13 Lectures: 7 CDs); *Thomas Merton on the 12 Degrees of Humility* (Introduction by Fr. Anthony Ciorra + 16 Lectures: 8 CDs); *Solitude and Togetherness* (Introduction by Fr. Anthony Ciorra + 11 Lectures: 11 CDs); *The Prophet’s Freedom* (Introduction by Fr. Anthony Ciorra + 8 Lectures: 8 CDs) (Rockville, MD: Now You Know Media, 2012).

6. James Finley, *Merton’s Palace of Nowhere: A Search for God through Awareness of the True Self* (Notre Dame, IN: Ave Maria Press, 1978).

Thomas Merton's conferences as novice master began to be recorded on audiotape in late April 1962, initially so that the brothers at the Abbey of Gethsemani (who at the time had a separate novitiate) could listen to them as they worked in the monastery kitchen. The practice continued throughout the rest of Merton's term as novice master, and subsequently his regular Sunday afternoon talks to the community during the final three years of his life, while he was living as a hermit, were also taped. Eventually more than six hundred recordings were made and preserved, including talks Merton himself taped at the hermitage to be sent to various audiences, presentations at different meetings held at Gethsemani and even the talks given in 1968 in California, Alaska and India.

Some of these recordings began to be made available commercially as early as the 1970s, when Electronic Paperbacks produced three sets of twelve cassettes each, a total of seventy-two conferences; later Credence Cassettes (renamed Credence Communications with the advent of the compact disc) issued just over one hundred cassettes, most of them two-sided (some of the later ones released as CDs as well). Recently Now You Know Media, a relatively new company specializing in original audio and video courses by well-known Catholic scholars, has begun an ambitious program of marketing Merton conferences in thematic sets, unlike the previous companies' practice in which each cassette was sold separately and without any stated connection with the others. In 2012, the first year in which these Merton recordings were produced by Now You Know, nine different sets, ranging from four conferences on two CDs to sixteen conferences on eight CDs were issued, a total of 81 for this single year (available as well in MP3 format). All but two sets include introductions to the material by Fr. Anthony Ciorra, presenter of the generally well-received 2011 Now You Know series of twelve lectures entitled *Thomas Merton: A Spiritual Guide for the Twenty-first Century*. While the list price for many of the lengthier series is quite high, all of them seem to be perpetually on sale for a considerably reduced cost. Given the limited space available, this "omnibus" review of the 2012 sets will focus somewhat less on the matter of Merton's presentations than on the manner of Now You Know's innovative packaging, which has had somewhat mixed results thus far but is a very promising and exciting beginning to what one may hope will become a major contribution to making Merton's message more widely available through the medium of the spoken word.

The first set to be issued, given the rather generic title *Thomas Merton on Contemplation*, is actually a kind of "grab-bag," or sampler, consisting of five conferences (a better term for the rather informal classes than "lectures," used by the publisher), only two of which actually mention

contemplatives and the contemplative life explicitly, and even these only in passing. The talks have no intrinsic connection with one another and are presented in no clearly discernible order, whether thematic or chronological, but the first three, at least, do serve as a fine introduction to Merton's teaching style and content. The first (numbered 2 after Fr. Ciorra's introduction), "Prayer and Meditation on the Meaning of Life," given on January 28, 1964, reflects on the recent community retreat and emphasizes the importance of authentic self-knowledge, as distinguished from introspective self-absorption, as the fruit of prayer; the next, "Monastic Spirituality: Life Is a Journey," is more than a year older, from January 16, 1963, and presents Abraham as a paradigm for the Christian and monastic life as a journey into the unknown to find God beyond the boundaries of familiar and comfortable patterns and habits; the third, "Cassian on Prayer," part of Merton's course on "Pre-Benedictine Monasticism" and dating from May 19, 1963, considers Cassian's teaching on constant prayer and the various kinds of prayer, including the "prayer of fire" that is beyond words; the last, entitled "Religious Silence," one of a small group on that topic and dating from December 14, 1963, consists largely of interactions with the novices on the topic of silence and makes a rather odd culmination to this heterogeneous group. The fourth presentation, "God-centered Prayer," is actually not from Merton's conferences to his novices at all; it was his first attempt to produce a tape for a non-Gethsemani audience, made in January 1967 for novices at the nearby motherhouse of the Sisters of Loretto with whom Merton had developed a warm relationship through their superior, Sr. Mary Luke Tobin; it discusses the life of prayer and answers some questions the novices had forwarded to him, on the role of emotions, the existence of hell, spiritual virginity—ending rather abruptly as the tape runs out but to be continued on the reverse side (not included here but found in a set issued in 2013 in which this recording is repeated¹). Fr. Ciorra's introductory comments provide a fine overview of Merton's main writings on contemplation and on his teaching on the importance of attentiveness and awareness of the divine presence, concluding with a beautiful passage from *The New Man*; but he touches only briefly on each of the five talks themselves, and refers to them as "Thomas Merton's conferences on contemplation" as though this were Merton's own intentional focus in this disparate group, which is clearly not the case. Fr. Ciorra does not deal at any length with the topic of Merton's novitiate conferences in general, nor does he provide any information on the chronology (unlike some of the subsequent sets,

1. Thomas Merton, *Prayer and Growth in Christian Life* (13 presentations on 5 CDs) (Rockville, MD: Now You Know Media, 2013).

this one does not indicate the dates of presentation on the case cover, but the publisher promises this omission will be remedied), so the listener has no way of knowing when the talks were given nor in what sequence. More context, both in general and in connection with these particular presentations, would have been of greater assistance and relevance than the introductory overview of contemplation drawn mainly from Merton's writings.

The set entitled *Finding True Meaning and Beauty* has no introduction by Fr. Ciorra, probably because the pair of conferences on beauty was initially slated to be issued alone, and the second pair on "Your Search for Meaning" was added only shortly before the set appeared. The two groupings have no intrinsic chronological or thematic connection with one another and were apparently packaged together only for convenience in marketing. The two conferences on meaning, from February 11 and 18 (mistakenly dated "13" on the case), 1968, are actually part of Merton's lengthy series of weekly presentations discussing Sufism, along with Hasidism, which began in April 1967 and continued, with various interruptions, through June 1968. They draw both on the Iranian-American psychologist Reza Arasteh's book on *Final Integration* (well known from Merton's essay-review "Final Integration: Toward a 'Monastic Therapy'"²) and on Martin Buber's collection of Hasidic tales, a number of which Merton reads and comments on in the course of the two presentations. From both sources Merton draws the lesson that authentic human wholeness cannot be simply adjustment to social and cultural norms but must involve a breakthrough to transcendent meaning that confronts the issues of mortality and meaningful creativity, which the Christian recognizes as the acceptance of the cross. The two conferences on beauty date from August 1964 and are actually the initial presentations from a series on art that will continue with a number of conferences on Celtic art, in particular, and then move on to the long sequence of talks on poetry that will continue through April of 1965. Merton emphasizes beauty as an intrinsic aspect of the being of any object, not merely a property of its generic essence but also the radiance of each particular being. The beauty of art is presented as "the splendor of being shining forth from a thing well made," which provides a delight that transcends sensual pleasure as well as the pleasure of knowing that involves the communication of information. He concludes his second conference with a brief look at contemporary art, contrasting the more subjective approach of expressionism with the objectivity of constructivist or conceptual art, which rejects the idea that the purpose

2. Thomas Merton, *Contemplation in a World of Action* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1971) 205-17.

of a work of art is to provide a picture (of something other than itself)—citing his friend Ad Reinhardt as exemplifying this position. Both pairs of presentations in this set are valuable and stimulating (though not to the degree of the hyperbolic “spellbinding lectures . . . [d]elivered with unrivaled brilliance and insight” as claimed on the case cover) but they have little actual connection with one another and would have been better issued as part of the sequences in which Merton originally presented them.

The least satisfactory of the 2012 releases is *Thomas Merton’s Great Sermons*. The four presentations included are neither all great, nor are they all sermons! In his introduction Fr. Ciorra encourages the audience to imagine themselves sitting in the pews of the choir in the abbey church as Merton is presiding and preaching at the liturgy, but in fact only one of these talks was given in the church, and at none of them was Merton the principal celebrant at Mass. The first, “Thomas Merton’s Sermon on the Trinity,” is only eight minutes long and was excerpted from a recording of a Mass celebrated at Gethsemani by Merton’s friend Dan Walsh on May 21, 1967, one week after he had been ordained. It focuses on the gospel reading from Matthew 28, the “great commission” to preach the good news to the ends of the earth and baptize in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, and applies this instruction to the monastic community, whose members obey this command through their openness to the other—for example to the poor and to those of other religious traditions—and to the future. This recording had been immediately preceded by two others in which Merton reflects on the feast and on the homily he is preparing; including these reflections would have complemented the actual sermon as delivered. The second selection, “Thomas Merton’s Sermon on the Feast of the Immaculate Conception,” was presented in the chapter room by Merton on December 8, 1962, when he had been assigned to give the feast-day sermon.³ It was later published in a considerably revised form as “A Homily on Light and the Virgin Mary” in Merton’s *Seasons of Celebration*,⁴ and a comparison of the two versions is quite instructive in revealing how Merton transformed an oral presentation very much rooted in the readings of the monastic office for the feast into a more general written meditation on Mary as “the perfect rekindling of the pure light which had been extinguished by the sin of Adam” (*SC* 163), no longer tied explicitly to the Feast of the Immaculate Conception. The final item, “Thomas Merton’s Sermon on Easter,” was never

3. See Thomas Merton, *Turning Toward the World: The Pivotal Years. Journals, vol. 4: 1960-1963*, ed. Victor A. Kramer (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1996) 271.

4. Thomas Merton, *Seasons of Celebration* (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1965) 158-70; subsequent references will be cited as “*SC*” parenthetically in the text.

preached at all: it is the recording made at the hermitage on September 14, 1967 for Argus Communications that was subsequently published as a small booklet entitled *He Is Risen*,⁵ and is identical to the published text except for minor omissions in the latter. As for the third presentation, “Prose and Poetry on the Passion of Christ,” it is in fact not a sermon but a novitiate conference focusing on material from Pascal’s *Pensées* on the Agony in the Garden, a brief Irish poem on the crucifixion and the medieval English lyric “Quia Amore Languo” (“Because I languish for love”), given on April 8, 1965 as part of Merton’s series of conferences on poetry (and will in fact be included in the set of these conferences released in 2013⁶—with no mention that it had already been issued as a sermon the previous year). Fr. Ciorra is apparently unaware of any of this information on the provenance of the material, and while he supplies an interesting commentary on Merton’s Christology in his introduction, it is of peripheral relevance to the material in these talks.

The seven conferences comprising the set entitled *Vatican II: The Sacred Liturgy and the Religious Life* come from two different time periods—December 1963, at the conclusion of the Council’s second session, and early 1965, shortly after the third session. There is no introductory overview by Fr. Ciorra, somewhat surprisingly as he himself has presented an entire series of talks for Now You Know on Vatican II.⁷ (An introduction is to be added to a revised version of this set.) The first three of Merton’s conferences were given in a single week (December 16, 18, 20, 1963) after he had received a copy of *The New York Times* with the text of the recently promulgated *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, the Dogmatic Constitution on the Liturgy. (He jokes a couple of times that this is the first time he’s given conferences from a newspaper.) He tells the novices that implementation of this constitution will result in the biggest change in the liturgy in 1600 years, and stresses the focus on full, conscious and active participation by all as the hallmark of liturgical reform. He speculates about the effect of these changes on monastic liturgy, the divine office as well as the Mass, and assures his audience that there will be no English office in monasteries (!). In the third of these conferences he provides a close reading of selected sections of the document, noting the emphasis

5. Thomas Merton, *He Is Risen* (Niles, IL: Argus, 1975); for details see Thomas Merton, *Learning to Love: Exploring Solitude and Freedom. Journals, vol. 6: 1966-1967*, ed. Christine M. Bochen (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1997) 291.

6. Thomas Merton, *Seeing the World in a Grain of Sand: Thomas Merton on Poetry* (Rockville, MD: Now You Know Media, 2013) #16.

7. Fr. Anthony Ciorra, *The Spirituality of Vatican II* (Rockville, MD: Now You Know Media, 2012).

on the presence of Christ in the assembly, the word, the priest and the sacrament, as well as the shift from the traditional concern with juridical power of the priest operative in the Mass to the ontological power of the Holy Spirit at work in the entire community. The fourth presentation briefly considers the other document approved at the Council's second session, the Decree on Social Communications, which Merton considers to have raised some important issues about the need to keep people informed concerning crucial moral and religious questions and events, but he concludes that overall the text is "rather dull." These remarks are actually only off-the-cuff prefatory comments, less than fifteen minutes in length, at the beginning of a regularly scheduled conference on St. Anselm, as is evident from Merton's words as the selected excerpt fades out (though dated 12/26/63 on the case cover, it almost certainly comes from Sunday, December 22, 1963, since it is part of an hour-long conference that was only given on Sundays, and continues a discussion on Anselm's notion of stability that had begun on December 8). Unlike the three conferences from December 1963, the three from January 17 and 31 and February 7, 1965 discuss a document that had not yet been passed by the Council—the decree on renewal of religious life. Merton points out that the preliminary schema for this had been summarily rejected as inadequate, and in successive conferences he considers an article on the schema by the Dominican theologian and Council *peritus* J.-M. Tillard, the "*modi*" (proposed revisions) drawn up by Cardinal Suenens and other conciliar reformers, and a similar series of suggested changes made by French experts. (Though he does not say so, Merton probably obtained copies of the latter two sources through his friend Sr. Luke Tobin, who was one of the few official women observers at the Council and was deeply involved in the process of revising the document.) Merton notes here, as with the liturgy document, the importance of a shift, as proposed by the reformers, from a focus on law to an emphasis on the role of the Holy Spirit, as well as the need for "adult and active participation of all members" of a religious community in authentic renewal, and in a deeper understanding of the contemporary meaning of obedience. He also highlights the role of religious life as an eschatological sign, especially a sign of the presence of the Kingdom of God here and now—an expression of the realized eschatology that was increasingly important to Merton in the 1960s. Though given more than a year apart, the two groups of conferences in this set have a coherence of focus and a consistency of perspective that makes this a valuable compilation. Though one may regret that Merton never discussed with the novices some of the other major Council documents, such as the Pastoral Constitution on the Church in

the Modern World (about which he did write extensively⁸) or the Decree on Non-Christian Religions (he was no longer novice master when these were issued at the end of the fourth and final session of the Council in December 1965), his comments in these conferences do complement well the insights on Vatican II expressed in his journals and letters and various essays.

The thirteen conferences included in *Thomas Merton on Sufism* (undated on the case cover) come from the Sunday conferences Merton gave weekly to the novices and any other community members who wished to attend during the years he lived as a hermit. This series continued for more than a year, off and on, beginning in April 1967 and running through June 1968. Unfortunately the set is incomplete, omitting not only the pair of conferences included in the *Finding True Meaning and Beauty* set but the introductory conference on varieties of Islamic thought and practice and at least four other presentations in the series; these gaps are at times evident in the presentations themselves, as Merton refers back to material in a previous lecture that does not appear in the recordings as provided here. The title is also somewhat misleading, as Merton frequently interwove material from Jewish Hasidism with that from Sufism, as well as bringing in various other disparate sources he was currently reading, so that if the listener is expecting a systematic explication of Sufi doctrine and practice he or she is bound to be disappointed (as Merton's friend and correspondent Abdul Aziz reportedly was when he heard these recordings⁹). Merton is clearly interested mainly in providing instruction on monastic practice and on the life of prayer for his intended audience, drawing on Sufi and Hasidic teaching along with whatever else he found relevant at the moment. Still, these conferences are filled with insightful comments on various aspects of Islamic and particularly Sufi theory and practice—on the inner meaning of the *shahada*, the basic proclamation of Islamic belief, that only God is fully real; on all reality as the self-manifestation of God; on the names of God and finding one's own name for God; on the centrality of the heart, the center of the self for the Sufi; on the practice of *dhikr*, or remembrance, as fundamental to Sufism; on the experience of divine mercy and compassion in authentic experience

8. See Thomas Merton, "Christian Humanism in the Nuclear Era," in *Love and Living*, ed. Naomi Burton Stone and Brother Patrick Hart (New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 1979) 151-70.

9. See Sidney H. Griffith, "'As One Spiritual Man to Another': The Merton-Abdul Aziz Correspondence," in Rob Baker and Gray Henry eds., *Merton & Sufism: The Untold Story* (Louisville, KY: Fons Vitae, 1999) 121; subsequent references will be cited as "Baker & Henry" parenthetically in the text.

of God; on the movement from *fana* to *baqa*, disintegration and reintegration of the self; on the importance of the spiritual guide, the *sheikh*, in the personal transmission of wisdom to the disciple. Though he remains rather vague about the particular circumstances in which this series of conferences was presented (he says only that they were given “to novices and juniors” in the 1960s), Fr. Ciorra’s introduction contextualizes Merton’s growing attraction to Sufism by reference to his contacts with Herbert Mason, Louis Massignon and Abdul Aziz; he highlights the importance of the visit of the Sufi master Sidi Abdeslam to Gethsemani in 1966; he indicates the importance of the Sufi concept of the “inner jihad,” the conflict with the lower self, along with the relevance of the Sufi focus on trials and bewilderment to monastic life, contemporary monastic life in particular; he refers his audience to the collection *Merton & Sufism: The Untold Story* as a fundamental resource for this topic (though he neglects to mention that key excerpts from the Sufism conferences are transcribed in that volume [see Baker & Henry 130-62]). All in all, Fr. Ciorra’s introduction to this set is perhaps the most helpful of any of the 2102 releases.

The two other most extensive sets of conferences released in 2012 are each complete sequences of the final sections of courses that Merton was giving the novices when taping began in the spring of 1962. *Ways of Prayer: A Desert Father’s Wisdom* includes thirteen conferences presented between April 28 and August 4, 1962, focused on John Cassian’s fourth, ninth and tenth conferences. This was the culmination of Merton’s extensive course on *Cassian and the Fathers* that included a preliminary discussion of “Monastic Spirituality and the Early Fathers from Apostolic Fathers to Evagrius Ponticus,” followed by “Lectures on Cassian,” which considered in detail the life and influence of this major transmitter of the tradition of Egyptian desert monasticism to the West, thoroughly summarized the teaching of Cassian’s *Institutes*, his treatise on monastic formation and observances and on the eight principal vices (which would be the major source for subsequent teaching on the “seven deadly sins”), and finally reflected on the more contemplative teaching found in Cassian’s *Conferences*. Merton had already discussed the first Conference, on the immediate objective (purity of heart) and final end (the Kingdom of God) of the monastic life, and the second Conference, on the crucial importance of discretion, at the point when the recordings begin. After a single class on the fourth Conference, concerned with concupiscence and the psychology of temptation and noting the importance of balance and moderation even in spiritual desire, Merton spends the rest of his time on the two Conferences on prayer that complete the first part of Cassian’s

treatise. He discusses Cassian's overview of the life of prayer as rooted in purity of heart, the instability of mind and addiction to busyness that lead to distractions in prayer, the four kinds of prayer (supplications, vows, intercessions and thanksgiving) that can sometimes be transformed into the contemplative "prayer of fire," and Cassian's extensive meditation on the Lord's Prayer; he concludes with consideration of Cassian's teaching on constant prayer, rooted in the practice of repetition of a brief invocation (for Cassian especially the phrase "O God come to my assistance, O Lord make haste to help me" from Psalm 69[70]). Since Merton's own teaching notes for these conferences have now been published,¹⁰ it is possible to compare the lively oral presentation of these conferences with the more detailed written version of the same material and so obtain a deeper appreciation both of Merton's approach to teaching his novices and of his own immersion in the material he has prepared. In his Introduction to this set Fr. Ciorra provides a helpful overview of Merton as a teacher, with a stress on his wisdom-oriented approach that emphasizes the appropriation of spiritual experience rather than the accumulation of factual information (though he himself is a bit careless with facts, stating that John Eudes Bamberger had been a student of Merton as a novice—rather than as a scholastic, and that Merton had taught at St. Bonaventure from 1938 to 1941 rather than 1940-41); he also gives his own brief but quite competent overview of Cassian's life and teaching. What he does not do, however, is focus at all on what Merton himself has to say about Cassian in these particular conferences, or give any indication that these are part of a much longer series of classes that provide the novices with a thorough introduction to the spirituality of Cassian and some of his predecessors. Neither the context nor the content of these talks receive any detailed attention.

Similar criticism can be made of Fr. Ciorra's Introduction to the second series of conferences from the same period, the final sixteen classes of Merton's course on the Benedictine *Rule*, given between July 11 and December 19, 1962 and released as *Thomas Merton on the 12 Degrees of Humility*. Fr. Ciorra again begins with an almost identical overview of Merton as teacher (including the same factual errors) and goes on to provide his own synopsis of the life of St. Benedict as related by St. Gregory the Great and his own overview of some principal points about the *Rule*, including the central importance of chapter 7 on humility, the focus of these recorded conferences. But once again, perhaps because he

10. Thomas Merton, *Cassian and the Fathers: Initiation into the Monastic Tradition*, ed. Patrick F. O'Connell (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 2005); for a comparison of oral and written versions see xlvii-liv.

does not want simply to summarize what Merton himself will be saying, Fr. Ciorra pays little explicit attention to the content of the presentations, and once again he provides no information about the course as a whole—also available in a published text¹¹—which includes extensive discussion of Gregory’s *Life*, detailed treatment of the Prologue to the *Rule* as the theological foundation of Benedict’s teaching, discussion of the four kinds of monks Benedict describes in chapter 1, and consideration of selected chapters of the *Rule* that focus on the abbot, the monastic community, its various officers, the importance of manual labor, and the centrality of poverty for monastic life, before coming to what Merton considers the heart of the spiritual teaching of the *Rule*, the degrees of humility. Merton emphasizes the necessity for monks to learn the main points of this chapter “by heart”—not only to memorize them but to interiorize them, to take them to heart. He looks at the archetypal image of the ladder, found not only here but in St. John Climacus and in St. Bernard’s reversal of Benedict’s progression in *The Steps of Humility and Pride*. He associates the way of humility with the way of the cross, which is the way to paradise. He points out that humility is the key to living out the Benedictine vow of conversion of manners. He then leads the novices on a step-by-step journey through the twelve degrees, at times providing a word-by-word analysis of St. Benedict’s formulations, consistently applying the teaching of the sixth-century text to the circumstances of his twentieth-century audience. Again a comparison of oral and written versions of the material calls attention to Merton’s pedagogical practice, his use of humor (often directed at himself), of apt stories and sayings borrowed from other traditions, including Zen, his references to current events, such as the Cuban Missile Crisis, which took place in the midst of these presentations, above all his repeated emphasis on the relevance of Benedict’s teaching on humility to Christian and specifically monastic discipleship.

The last two sets of 2012 releases to be considered, entitled *Solitude and Togetherness* and *The Prophet’s Freedom*, turn out to be the recordings of the two retreats that Merton organized and presented at Gethsemani for contemplative prioresses in December 1967 and May 1968, though there is no indication of this in the summaries provided on the case covers. Fr. Ciorra does identify the occasion in his introduction to *Solitude and Togetherness* but never mentions that the transcripts of the retreats

11. Thomas Merton, *The Rule of Saint Benedict: Initiation into the Monastic Tradition* 4, ed. Patrick F. O’Connell (Collegeville, MN: Cistercian Publications, 2009); for a comparison of oral and written versions, see xlii–xlvi.

have been published in the volume *The Springs of Contemplation*,¹² and speaks vaguely of their being held in the “two-year period” 1967-68 whereas in fact the two retreats were less than six months apart. He discusses Merton’s booklet *Loretto and Gethsemani*¹³ without making clear that while Sr. Luke Tobin was present at many of the sessions, Loretto is not a contemplative community, leaving open the possibility of misunderstanding. His introduction to *The Prophet’s Freedom* seems to presuppose that his listeners have already heard the preceding introduction as he simply refers off-hand to “these conversations,” and his discussion of Merton and Vatican II would have been more apropos for the set of conferences on Merton and the Council. In neither introduction does he identify the two sets as the recordings of the December 1967 and the May 1968 conferences, respectively, and he makes no use of Merton’s journal comments on the retreats, for example when he calls the first “the best retreat I ever made in my life.”¹⁴ The recordings themselves, nine from the 1967 retreat (with two more containing Merton’s subsequent reflections, made for the nuns in the days immediately following), and eight from 1968, make clear that the first retreat was focused more on internal issues of religious life itself while the second was more concerned with relations with the world beyond the cloister, hence the respective titles of the two sets. Unfortunately the series are once again incomplete: material from the chapter of *The Springs of Contemplation* entitled “Collaboration, Penance, Celibacy” (*SpC* 231-41) is missing completely, and sections of three other chapters (*SpC* 74-77, 88-90, 221-29) are also omitted; all these segments involve a great deal of dialogue and interaction, which may have prompted their exclusion (though much conversation characterizes all the conferences of both retreats). Nonetheless, the recordings prove to be an invaluable corrective to *The Springs of Contemplation*, which is revealed by comparison to be a far from reliable text. It was already evident from a reference to the death of Martin Luther King in one of the chapters included in the 1967 section of the book that there was some inaccuracy in placement, but it is now clear as well that the two final chapters in the 1968 section actually belong to the 1967 retreat (as the chapter missing in the recordings probably does as well). The recordings also reveal that

12. Thomas Merton, *The Springs of Contemplation: A Retreat at the Abbey of Gethsemani*, ed. Jane Marie Richardson, SL (New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 1992); subsequent references will be cited as “*SpC*” parenthetically in the text.

13. Thomas Merton, *Loretto and Gethsemani* (Trappist, KY: Abbey of Gethsemani, 1962); this text is also included as an appendix in *Springs of Contemplation* (275-85).

14. Thomas Merton, *The Other Side of the Mountain: The End of the Journey. Journals, vol. 7: 1967-1968*, ed. Patrick Hart (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1998) 21 [12/7/1968].

the transcription goes beyond simply removing redundancies and verbal tics to extensive paraphrase and even rewriting of Merton's words; that the material is often radically reordered—material from the third 1967 conference, for example, being scattered over four different chapters, including the second last in the entire book; that some sections are radically condensed, and a number of large segments of the material are simply omitted, whether deliberately or inadvertently—for example forty minutes of the conclusion of Merton's presentation on Hasidism and thirty minutes of the opening segment of his discussion of Yoga in the following conference (probably his most extensive treatment of the major tenets of Hinduism); that quotations from sources Merton is reading (e.g. an article by Joost Meerloo [*SpC* 5-6]) are sometimes presented as Merton's own words (and transcribed just as loosely). Errors are introduced: a reference to St. Thérèse of Lisieux is mistakenly transferred to St. Teresa of Avila (*SpC* 17); when Merton refers to Fr. Thomas Philippe's teaching on Mary as "marvelous stuff," in *Springs of Contemplation* this material is erroneously attributed to "Paul Philippe, formerly secretary of the congregation for religious" (*SpC* 49-50), whereas what Merton actually said was that Thomas Philippe was "no relation to Paul Philippe, who used to be the secretary of the congregation." It will be essential henceforth to consult these recordings rather than simply relying on *Springs of Contemplation* for any references to or citations of these important retreats.

Now You Know Media is to be highly commended for embarking on this daunting project. Though of the 59 actual "novitiate" recordings (not counting the retreats and other more specialized taping), 44 had been previously available commercially (18 of these from both Electronic Paperbacks and Credence), the decision to issue these recordings in coherently related sets, even if realized only imperfectly for some of these releases, marks a revolutionary advance in giving listeners the opportunity to comprehend and appreciate what Merton was actually about in the novice conferences, in his weekly talks during the hermitage period, with their rather different purpose and dynamics, and in the various other types of presentations also preserved on tape during these last seven years of Merton's life. It is to be hoped that Now You Know will continue its project—with carefully assembled complete groupings and with introductory commentary more oriented toward situating the material in specific chronological and topical contexts—until virtually all the "oral Merton" has become available to a wide general audience.

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