

'Thomas Merton: A Monk Who "Succeeded"': An Interview by Correspondence with Dom M. Laurence Bourget, OCSO

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Before I knew my first Cistercian well, I had surmised that years turning into decades of monastic observance could grind a monk down to a walking non-entity smothered in a cowl without character or edge. Thomas Merton's early writing would have had us believe that a 'successful' monk so disappears into his community as to become faceless. The exact opposite is happily true. Monastic life for the solemnly and long professed carves out a personship and the decidedly less fair aspects of a monk's personality become more clearly etched, as time goes on, in a symmetry of contradictions not understood by the casual or the outside observer.

*Monastic life makes a monk more himself and most Cistercians, not only a Thomas Merton, evolve into 'rare birds'. Not a jot less rare is Dom M. Laurence Bourget of St Joseph's Abbey in Spencer, Massachusetts, who has lived the monastic life since 26 July 1933. Disabuse yourself of assumptions that so senior a monk spends his days asleep over his breviary. Dom Laurence remains sharp-witted and continues to exercise intellectual acumen: for 'light reading' he has recently finished all 15 volumes of Marcel Proust's *A la recherche du temps perdu*.¹ Born 27 November 1915, Laurence Bourget is a natural archivist and throughout his 83 years he appears to have allowed little to escape his notice and memory. I interviewed him about a covey of Cistercian 'rare birds' he has known personally, characters about whom every serious reader of Merton's biography should learn: Dom James Fox, the Abbots General Gabriel Sortais and Ignace Gillet, Fr Raymond Flanagan, and the Secretary to both Dom Gabriel and Dom Ignace, Fr Clement de Bourmont. As the American Definitor at Rome in the Generalate from May*

1959 until April 1971, Dom Laurence was in a unique position to observe these Cistercians who exerted pressure upon Merton's literary and monastic career. Furthermore his familiarity with monasteries of the Order worldwide gives him a wide lens to judge the Cistercian character as it has manifested itself in this century.

Editing this interview I realized it does not come close to touching upon what Laurence Bourget could tell if he were more properly and at length prompted. Monastic seniors of his insight and experience become every day more rare. Monks are no more sensitive nor more foresighted than the general population in realizing what treasures of wisdom inhabit their Seniores. Desiring naturally to appreciate 'our moment', we sideline the wise among us who could give us a context for and who offer us perspective on what we are perceiving as 'new under the sun'. Should Laurence Bourget's too brief reporting here prompt others to begin an oral history or a VCR project among their monastic seniors, perhaps to be read or viewed by novices on Feast Days as a new kind of martyrology, his answering these few questions will prove to have been missionary. Fr Laurence answered my questions in writing and reviewed the editing of his responses.

Montaldo: You are senior to Thomas Merton in the monastic life by seven years but as old as he would be today. Are you the most senior American Cistercian?

Bourget: Merton and I were in fact both born in 1915, on January 31st and November 27th respectively. We have something else in common: he was born in Prades, France (which I remember visiting on 21 May 1977) and his early schooling was in French schools. I was born in Rhode Island but am of French descent and almost my entire schooling was bilingual. Apart from this Merton and I were of quite different backgrounds. By the time Merton joined the Trappists at Our Lady of Gethsemani in 1941, I had been a monk at Our Lady of the Valley in Rhode Island since 1933 and was only one year away from ordination. At present I am possibly the fourth in monastic seniority, though not in age, among the monks of our American houses.

Montaldo: Describe your own entry into the Trappists. What was the 'climate of monastic prayer' at Our Lady of the Valley when you were a young monk? Did you have much time for solitary prayer? Were you taught 'contemplation' practically or only theoretically?

Bourget: When I entered 'the Valley' at the age of 17 just out of high school in 1933, the monks had been in Rhode Island only since 1900.

1. Marcel Proust, *A la recherche du temps perdue* (Paris: Gallimard, 1913–23).

They had come to Cumberland from Nova Scotia where they had been since 1825, the first Trappist foundation in the New World. The stone buildings of the monastery when I entered were practically new: the Gothic church dated from 1928 and the Chapter/Infirmary wing had been built only in 1931. The novitiate building was completed in 1937 followed by the Porter's Lodge in 1938.

I was attracted to the monastic life not so much by the 'atmosphere' that one usually associates with monastic piles as I was by the beauty and deep reverence which characterized the sung Mass and the Divine Office. I had regularly attended both as I lived only a few miles away, within walking distance for a boy of my age.

Merton had visited Our Lady of the Valley just after Labor Day in 1941 and after his important Easter retreat at Gethsemani in April of that year. He was impressed by us but not over-awed. I re-read the account of his visit in *The Seven Storey Mountain*: 'Kneeling in the tribune, with the sun pouring through the windows on to a great, curiously bloodless, Crucifix, and with the chanting of the monks taking my heart home to God and rocking it in the peace of those majestic thoughts and cadences...there were [nevertheless] none of the great overwhelming consolations and lights that had practically swamped me at Gethsemani.'² It is quite true that a monastic call is to a specific monastery and Merton's was obviously to Gethsemani.

When I came to the Valley admittedly it took some doing on my part to become accustomed to the primitive living conditions, the frugal food, the exhausting manual labor and especially the long hours (seven hours a day in my time) spent in choir. But the sung Mass and the Divine Office, for one of my musical background, were all the uplift I needed especially after I became the full-time organist in 1935, assistant Cantor and then, off and on over the ensuing years, Choir Master and Cantor. 'Solitary prayer' was hard to come by and was relegated to the intervals between the innumerable other regular exercises. But in our case we had the living example of deep men of prayer ever before our eyes, men who 'walked with God', who spent every available moment in profound contemplative prayer. We novices received spiritual direction from these, while our monastic formation was imparted by a venerable, wise and experienced French Novice Master who himself always stressed the need to interiorize the observances. The accent, insofar as I can remember, was not on the penitential side of our life as an end in itself. Great importance was

2. *The Seven Storey Mountain* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1948), p. 351.

attached to our Benedictine and Cistercian spiritual heritage even as we were taught to hold dear the traditions handed down by our Trappist founders of Petit Clairvaux who had been companions of Dom Augustine de Lestrangé at La Val Sainte in Switzerland to whom we owed our monastic survival.

Yes, I think I can identify with Merton in his early experiences at Gethsemani in the 1940s and early 1950s. I was the youngest in my community and the first of a new generation of many young or youngish men to enter after me in quick succession. Being, like Merton, of a more studious bent and not oriented to hard labor, I plunged into the bountiful stock of monastic literature, mostly in French at that time or in Latin. Under the aegis of one such 'find', Dom Anselme LeBail's for me epoch-making book, *L'Ordre de Cîteaux: 'La Trappe'*,³ I came to realize that Cistercian spirituality was radically Benedictine and that to recapture the particular charism of our Fathers of Cîteaux we had to go beyond, if not exactly transcend, the spirituality of outward observances that became characteristic of nineteenth-century and early twentieth-century Trappist houses everywhere. That Trappist spirituality was neatly encapsulated in the oft-repeated saying, 'Keep the Rule [meaning the outward observances] and the Rule will keep you'.

I feel that Frater Louis very early on sensed what I did and in his early writings began to stress these underlying, perennial Benedictine values as fundamental to our Cistercian life and spirit. I also have the impression, though I wouldn't want to exaggerate, that in a very traditional community with many senior monks trained in another period and in another 'spirit' than his, Merton had greater difficulty in making himself 'heard' and understood. It was providential that soon after ordination he was entrusted with the formation of the junior professed and later of the novices in whom he found a receptive audience and, as the sequel was to show, a devoted and faithful following.

Montaldo: When did you first visit Gethsemani?

Bourget: In late May 1959. I had recently been elected 'American Definitor', an assistant to the Abbot General in Rome (who at that time represented the monks and nuns of the English-speaking monasteries of the United States and of their new foundations). My first impressions of the Abbey are still vivid. I immediately sensed an atmos-

3. Paris: Letouzey et Ané, 1924.

phere, almost an 'aura', of great Trappist austerity and penance which impregnated the entire monastery and that had so impressed the 26-year-old Merton on his first visit during Holy Week. Dom James Fox had been Abbot since 1948 but many of the older Fathers and Brothers of Dom Frederic Dunne's time and even of Dom Edmond Obrecht's, both of whom I had known as a young monk, along with that dear man, Dom Vital Klinski [b. 1886. Abbot of Achel in Belgium from 1920 to 1927. Transferred to Gethsemani in 1927], were very much alive. On my first and subsequent visits they regaled me with wonderful tales of 'the early days' so tellingly utilized in Merton's first published journal, *The Sign of Jonas*. The process of modernizing the main quadrangle had not yet begun and it was easy for me to reconstruct the *venue* so familiar to the monks and laybrothers of the last century captured in the old yellowed photographs. Warm, muggy weather had already begun when I first came to Kentucky and what the fully clothed monks must have suffered in their stuffy dormitory was easy to guess. In this respect the monks at the Valley were fellow-sufferers.

I must confess that I felt right at home at Gethsemani from the start and I have continued to feel at home on all my subsequent visits. Despite apparent surface differences between Trappist houses we are all 'carved from the same rock'!

Montaldo: Is there such a phenomenon as a 'classic Trappist'? If there is a 'Trappist mold', did Merton fit it? Would you sympathize with Merton's self-assessment of always feeling like 'a duck in a chicken coop'?

Bourget: As I grow older in the monastic life and weigh my soundings into the 'individuating notes' of every Trappist I have known—and by this time I have known hundreds of them, perhaps more if you count those I have known indirectly—I am convinced that, despite superficial similarities in comportment and expectable reactions, there has never been any such creature as a 'classic Trappist' except it be the figment of a creative, but not too insightful, abbatial imagination or of a *dépassé* monastic hagiographer. Whenever I guide visitors around my monastery and pass through our monastic cemetery, I often remark that the only truly successful monks are those resting underground: they made it! And yet I also point out (as my survivors will no doubt say of me) that while they were alive a number of these 'success stories' were square pegs in round holes: strikingly individual as persons and monks.

Was Merton a 'rare bird' among American Trappists during his

monastic career? Why only then and not his whole life? Although he stood out singularly he was by no means singular. He began—or more correctly continued—his writing career under obedience to his first abbot, Dom Frederic Dunne. So did Raymond Flanagan. I happened to be quite close to one of the Order's Censors, Fr Maurice Malloy, a former Holy Ghost priest from Duquesne University High School, a member of my own community. He would go through both Gethsemani authors' books with a fine-toothed comb. The very different reception by each author to Fr Maurice's at times hair-splitting critiques was very revelatory. Fr Louis had a sense of humor and his own brand of intellectual humility, a saving feature that Fr Raymond seemed to lack when the Censor called for revisions. In the case of Fr Louis' poetry, however, the Censor would simply admit, 'he could not understand it' and would let it pass untouched. It was Fr Maurice, by the way, who had objected to Merton's colloquial style, which he considered inappropriate for a monk. It was he who urged that Merton's autobiography be put aside until he 'learned to write decent English'. To be fair to Fr Maurice, however, I know of other knowledgeable persons outside the monastery who made the same objections to Merton's style.

A 'duck in a chicken coop'? As I said earlier, Fr Louis sensed that the truly contemplative aspect of our Cistercian charism, its heart and vital core, had been for many years overshadowed by the regimentation of our lives by observances under the guise of 'uniformity' and 'regularity'. When he pleaded for greater freedom, call it more self-expression if you will, he perhaps stood out like a sore thumb and found it hard to be heard and understood. But his squeaking wheel got attention and his voice was a prophetic one. Vatican II helped us Cistercians reach conclusions Merton had early embraced. In order to bring our Constitutions into harmony with the documents of that Sacred Synod we would be required to suppress outmoded regulations which is exactly what the Order's new Constitutions (1990) brought about eventually. I hasten to add, however, that Fr Louis' insight went far beyond a purely external *aggiornamento* of observances. His real aim was to foster the 'inner experience' of Cistercians which he was personally exploring so sedulously. In this respect I do judge him a 'rare bird' but not the only 'rare bird' in our Order. I feel that Merton ranks among the great spiritual masters of our Order of the last 100 years, even if his approach, unlike many of our other spiritual masters in general, tended to make use of modern-day terminology and thought patterns.

Montaldo: As a Definitor in Rome from 1959 through 1971 you worked closely with the Abbot General Dom Gabriel Sortais. Can you give a brief portrait of Dom Gabriel and what you know of his sentiments in regard to Merton's literary career?

Bourget: To try to give a portrait of Gabriel Sortais (1902–1963) within the narrow confines of an interview like this would be quite impossible without short-changing such a multifaceted personality like his. Dom Guy Oury, OSB's 'Life' of Dom Gabriel⁴ runs to 338 pages and still there are those who knew Sortais well who feel that certain periods of his life, for example, the war years, were glossed over. Having known him from the time he became Abbot of Bellefontaine in 1936 until his death in 1963, I have deeply felt feelings about him, many of which are well expressed by Dom Oury while others are peculiarly my own. Here was a man born to rule who, becoming a monk, could not but become an abbot and, in his case, an abbot general. Sortais was a general in every sense of the word. I was told that he could not stand even the mention of the name of General de Gaulle since 'like repels like'. As Abbot General Gabriel Sortais was a positive person and yet always realistic. Dom Oury noted correctly that Dom Gabriel 'knew the facts of life'. And yet he was a man present to God, to his neighbor and to his daily task. I knew Sortais to be a man of prayer. Each and every monk and nun in the Order was for him in actual fact what he called them: *cher fils, chère fille* [dear son, dear daughter]. To be cited before him for some reason or another was to be assured of receiving a personal, preferential treatment. Dom Sortais could always be expected to apply the French saying, '*Tout comprendre c'est tout pardonner*' [To understand everything is to forgive everything]. On my arriving in Rome on 30 June 1959 to assume my duties as Definitor, his very first words to me were, 'I'm so glad you did not become discouraged! I was so afraid that you would!'

In the light of Dom Sortais' personal respect for and interest in each individual member of the Order, precisely as an individual, I have every reason to think he would have felt a natural liking for and closeness to Fr Louis as one born in France, who was taught in French schools and who thoroughly commanded the French language. Dom Gabriel, by the way, was no linguist—a great drawback in what I will tell you shortly—and being able to converse freely with Fr Louis without an interpreter would doubtless have created a close personal

4. *Dom Gabriel Sortais (1902–1963)* (Solesmes: Editions Abbaye de Solesmes, 1975).

bond at the outset. This familiarity appears whenever Fr Louis mentions in his Journals of having spoken to the General at Gethsemani. This also made it much easier for both to reach an *entente*, frank if not always cordial, in correspondence dealing with the granting, or withholding, of the *Imprimi Potest* or the *Nihil Obstat* for one of Merton's writings.

Dom Sortais' personal sentiments towards Merton's literary career is another matter altogether. Both the Abbot General and his personal secretary, Fr Clement de Bourmont, were always very circumspect in speech in regards to their dealings with Fr Louis' writing. The topic was never once brought up at the General's Council Meetings to the best of my recollection. But I sensed that Fr Louis gave them both *beaucoup de fil à retordre* [many a headache] once the critiques of Fr Louis' manuscripts were received from the Order's censors. Remember that all of these comments had to pass first through the Secretary's, Fr Clement's, hands to be translated since the General could not read any English.

Montaldo: I am surprised that you are so sanguine about Dom Sortais' and Fr Clement's reactions to Merton's writing. Wasn't there angry opposition by both of them to Merton's writings on war and non-violence? You obviously knew Fr Clement well. Didn't you sense him—maybe this is to exaggerate—an 'enemy' of Merton's literary career?

Bourget: I find myself in something of a quandary in trying to explain the personality of someone who, like the Abbot General he served so self-sacrificingly, was a very unusual person. Fr Clement [Jean de Ghaisne] de Bourmont (1918–93) displayed all the signs of his titled lineage and military background. Very intelligent and well educated to begin with, he was already graduating from military school when World War II broke out and, before being made a prisoner of war in Germany in 1940, he served as a non-commissioned officer with great distinction. In later years he never neglected to prepare and stand for his Reserve Officer exams and, if I remember correctly, rose to the rank of Captain. Frankly I often had the impression that the relation between him and Dom Sortais, a Colonel, was literally that of a subaltern officer with his CO!

Fr Clement served as Dom Gabriel's secretary, chauffeur and factotum, day and night, from 1951 until 1963 when the General died suddenly. He did the same for Dom Ignace Gillet from 1963 until 1966. He resumed these duties under Dom Ambrose Southey in 1975,

remaining at the Generalate until 1983. During these extensive 'tours of duty' he visited all the houses of the Order worldwide repeatedly. Whereas his spoken English was not what his perfectionist nature would have liked, he understood it very well and read it even better. I think he likewise knew Italian and Spanish more than adequately.

I am not in a position to pass on the truth of any impression that Fr Clement was, as you describe him, an 'enemy of Merton's literary career'. To begin with, Fr Clement was not a Censor of Merton's writing. However, he would have been the first to see the critiques of the Order's Censors as they reached the Generalate and had the unenviable task of translating them and transmitting them to the General. And I know from long experience as an abbatial secretary/translator how easy it would be to make matters worse than they were (though on occasion I have had to make them seem better than they were, in the interest of peace if not of truth!). I have difficulty in believing that Father Clement knowingly inflamed Dom Gabriel against Merton's writings on war and non-violence since that would have been unethical and unchristian. Besides, Dom Gabriel needed no one to make up his mind for him. Knowing Fr Clement as I did, I find it very hard to believe he disdained Merton or knowingly set himself up as a 'stumbling block' to Merton's literary career.

However, and having said all this in defense of someone whom I respected, even if he self-righteously dressed me down on more than one occasion, I am willing to say on pure instinct, being of French descent myself, that Fr Clement, we must never forget, came from a French military background, for whom '*noblesse oblige*' was paramount. Merton's outspoken opposition to his country's involvement in the Vietnam war, for instance, might have stirred up Fr Clement's sense of 'my country right or wrong' loyalty. He might have thought Merton disloyal to the United States and to France's colonial war in Vietnam that had preceded US intervention. This is a hunch but one that I have had for a very long time.

Montaldo: Dom Gabriel's successor, Ignace Gillet, also disapproved of Merton's writing against war. What can you tell us about Gillet and how did you come to persuade Gillet to allow the publication of Merton's *Peace in the Post-Christian Era*,⁵ which Dom Gabriel had suppressed in Merton's *Seeds of Destruction*?

5. The articles from *Peace in the Post-Christian Era*—'Can We Choose Peace?', 'War in Origen and St Augustine', 'The Legacy of Machiavelli' and 'The Christian as Peacemaker'—were reworked and published as 'The Christian in World Crisis:

Bourget: Dom Ignace (Jacques) Gillet (1901–1997) was as different from Dom Gabriel, at least in temperament, as night and day. As a prisoner of war for all of five years he turned the tables on his captors by learning German so well that, as an abbot, he would later be delegated to conduct regular visitations in German-speaking houses. He also studied English diligently and, as an old Roman student with a doctoral degree in Theology from the Gregorian University, he knew Latin, Greek and Hebrew along with Italian. He was a modest and humble man who hid his intellectual talents under a bushel! But he was by nature a follower rather than a leader of the Sortais stamp. At the General Chapter, contrary to Dom Sortais, Dom Gillet simply presided, letting the Moderator (at that time Dom Ambrose Southey of Mount Saint Bernard and Dom Gillet's successor) organize and direct the proceedings, he himself taking copious notes meanwhile. The compendious nature of these notes is shown by the fact that, after his retirement in 1974, Dom Ignace embarked on his memoirs of the General Chapters and, at the time of his death in 1997, had covered only the first two years of his Generalate but in many hundreds of pages of manuscript.

It must be kept in mind that Dom Gillet came to be Abbot General by the simple accident of Dom Sortais' sudden death in 1963. He had to learn the ropes mostly from his much more experienced secretary, none other than Fr Clement de Bourmont, who agreed to stay on until 1966. These were still what I would call Merton's 'war and peace years' with books and essays of protest issuing constantly from his pen. To call Fr Clement the *éminence grise* of Dom Gillet's attitude toward Merton, as he had perhaps been of Dom Sortais, might be a shade too inferential, but I know that in his memoirs of this period Dom Gillet had some rather hard things to say of Merton. Or, rather, his memoirs were harsh on Merton until the Abbot of Dombes, the monastery of his profession to which he had retired, told him to 'tone it down'. Time, in any case, seemed to have worked a change in his attitude towards Merton.

When I had lunch with Dom Ignace on 13 May 1997 all he was prevailed upon to say about Merton was that 'he could not make up his mind just where he wanted to be a hermit: Alaska, California, where else besides Gethsemani?' Then in his 97th year, Dom Ignace

Reflections on the Moral Climates of the 1960s'. For the publishing history of *Peace in the Post-Christian Era*, see Patricia A. Burton, *Merton Vade Mecum: A Quick-Reference Bibliographic Handbook* (Louisville, KY: Thomas Merton Center Foundation Publications, 1999), p. 165.

was more interested in his lunch—he retained a marvelous appetite—and in recounting his five years as a prisoner of war than in answering my questions about Merton. I do have a clear recollection of his calling me to his office in July 1964 and of his asking me to read a typescript. ‘Would you read this text of Merton and tell me if you find anything objectionable in it? We have no time to send it to the Censor because the printer is waiting for it to complete a book.’ I did read the text very carefully and returned it promptly to the General with the comment, ‘Far from finding anything objectionable in it, I find what it says is pure Gospel!’ Dom Ignace looked pleased and relieved and thanked me. Only later did I learn the whole background of the Merton text as he himself set it down in his journal for 14 July 1964: ‘This morning... Brother Simon told me that the long section on peace for *Seeds of Destruction* had been passed without change by the General. Thus the real heart of the forbidden book, *Peace in the Post-Christian Era*, is to be published after all.’⁶ Had I known how controversial this text had been in Dom Gabriel’s eyes, I might have been tempted to say to the General, ‘What was all the fuss about?’ But I am glad I didn’t. What still mystifies me, however, is that at that time (July 1964) Fr Clement was still the General’s secretary and I now wonder if I was only called in because he happened to be absent from Rome. The ways of Divine Providence indeed!

Montaldo: In the context of the particular decades in which Merton wrote, was it your personal assessment that Merton should not have been publishing private journals and an autobiography as a Trappist?

Bourget: The Revised Statute on Censorship of Publications by the General Chapter of 1952, contemporary with Merton’s writing career, reminded all religious of the Order that ‘the publication of books, etc... must be rather exceptional in our life of retreat [from the world] and of solitude, unless these are intended for the religious of the Order or treat questions concerning the Order’. The *Imprimi Potest* was reserved to the General Chapter or to the Abbot General when the Chapter was not in session. All of which is a far cry from the most recent Statute in the Order’s new Constitutions (1990) where the spirit is entirely different. Its opening section states: ‘This Statute is to assist superiors in their pastoral care for the monks and nuns in their

6. Thomas Merton, *Dancing in the Water of Life: Seeking Peace in the Hermitage* (Journals, 5; 1963–1966; ed. Robert E. Daggy; San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1997), p. 127.

communities who submit writings for publication. When God gives to a member of the Order the talent for writing, the pastoral concern of his or her Superior will channel this gift so that it can enrich the Church and our communities and make our patrimony better known and more fully developed.’ Would that Thomas Merton had lived under this new dispensation!

As for my personal assessment of his writing an autobiography and publishing private journals, *The Seven Storey Mountain* came out in 1948 and was a breakthrough, being frankly autobiographical, something totally unheard of in the Order until then. How it got through the Censors amazes me and must have required considerable finessing on the part of Dom Frederic Dunne to have it approved for publication. Not only that but the author’s name was to be used whereas until then only abbatial authors as well known as Dom Vital Lehodey, Dom Anselme LeBail or Dom Jean Baptiste Chautard had that privilege. Then again, all but the last 51 pages of *The Seven Storey Mountain* treated of what had led up to Merton’s entering Gethsemani, the remainder being his life ‘in the world’. At that, as we now know, Merton’s self-revelations had to be pruned ‘lest it disedify!’ *The Waters of Siloe*⁷ came out in quick succession in 1949 but because of its mostly historical nature along with excellent concluding chapters on ‘The Cistercian Character and Sanctity’ and on the ‘*Paradisus Claustralis* [Cloistered Paradise]’, it must have had an easier time of it since it was outstandingly ‘edifying’ and fostered the Trappist Order’s persona!

Looking back I cannot recall making a ‘personal assessment’ of the rightness or wrongness of a Trappist letting it all out by publishing private journals or an autobiography, perhaps because it took some time for *The Seven Storey Mountain* to be made available to us. We had no idea that it had become a bestseller in the secular world; it certainly wasn’t that in the monastic one and I cannot recall it being read in our Refectory. The same applies to *The Sign of Jonas*:⁸ it took me years to get around to reading both books, and, when I did, I had no special objection to their autobiographical nature but rather to their somewhat one-sided presentation of Trappist life, observance and spirit—such as Merton saw them at the time.

In later years I did feel a bit queasy about a Trappist taking on social issues of war and race relations, but by then I had branched out myself and Merton’s thoughts on such issues, not to mention on true

7. *The Waters of Siloe* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & Company, 1949).

8. *The Sign of Jonas* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & Company, 1953).

and false *aggiornamento* in the Church and in the Order, found a resounding echo in my heart and mind. In speaking out as he did he suffered many a trouncing and many a put down, but I felt that he did what he had to do, come what may. His chapter, 'Events and Pseudo-Events' in *Faith and Violence*⁹ and much of *Conjectures of a Guilty Bystander*¹⁰ moved me deeply. Let me say simply that I was of mixed feelings about 'one of us' speaking out so fearlessly and frankly, whatever the cost. I think many of us felt that way.

Montaldo: You knew Dom James Fox personally: can you comment on his character? What challenges faced Dom James as he inherited Gethsemani from Dom Frederic Dunne? Could you shed light on Dom James' and Fr Louis' relationship?

Bourget: Comments on Dom James' character could be accomplished infinitely better by a member of the Community who lived under him and who was in daily contact with him during the long years of his abbatial tenure (1948–68). My contacts with him date especially to my 12-year tenure as American Definitor, to visiting Gethsemani as I did regularly during those years, and to our frequent exchange of letters. Special circumstances during the years 1960–61, when there was a painful change of superiors at St Joseph's Abbey, Spencer, drew him much closer, but that is another story. I say from the outset that the way Dom James comes across, the picture painted of him by Fr Louis whenever he mentions 'Dom J.' or 'Reverend Father', has always pained me deeply as being utterly subjective, unfair and, yes, self-serving. Surely Dom James Fox was the product of his social, cultural, religious, educational background—who isn't? I soon came to know, for one thing, Dom James' own peculiar approach to people and situations. He was generally much better informed about these [matters] than you were, but before he shared any of his own information, he would probe you good-naturedly but perseveringly. I found myself often fully 'de-briefed' by Dom James before he made any comment on the perspective I was providing him. However, I never found him petty or conniving.

It is not for me to probe into either his official or personal relationship with Thomas Merton. As I see it, it was a case of one rather complicated person having spiritual responsibility before God, the Church and the Order, along with his own conscience, for another

very complicated and, for my money, very vacillating person. The ambivalent and uncomfortable situation in which Dom James found himself vis-à-vis Fr Louis in his final years as Abbot, resulting in a strict 'stay at home' policy for Fr Louis; Dom James' very good reasons for this policy; how troubled Dom James was when this policy was relaxed by his successor, Fr Flavian Burns, for the latter's own good reasons; all of this has never been brought fully out into the open. Respect for persons, along with professional discretion, prevents my saying anything more on their relationship but I cannot forbear repeating that I wish someone in possession of all the facts would set Dom James' record straight inasmuch as he himself never did so and never said anything to vindicate his tarnished reputation in the minds of Merton's readers. He was a humble man and too sincere a friend and spiritual father to Merton to wish to do this himself.

Dom James was severely challenged on many fronts when he was elected Abbot of Gethsemani. More than has ever been the case with my own Community, I believe there has been from the start, or at least from the time of Dom Edmund Obrecht, a well-defined and accepted Community outlook, I would even say 'ethos', at Gethsemani that focused on strict monastic observance, one marked by great austerity of life, poverty, enclosure, silence, etc. This ethos was very much in evidence, as I said, when I first went there in 1959. Dom James' tenure was also the high tide of a phenomenal number of new recruits, which necessitated the opening of several foundations, including taking on, very generously, Spencer's foundation in Chile. To this challenge, inherited from Dom Frederic, was added the even greater one, I think, of facing the changes brought about in both the Order's *aggiornamento* initiated, if the truth be told, by Dom Gabriel Sortais, and in the religious life at large consequent upon Vatican II. To make matters perhaps even more difficult for him, and for this he has never to my knowledge been thanked, was the latitude he gave Merton to think out this whole process of change, to discuss it freely with those students and novices entrusted to him, and to set his thoughts in writing for publication, be the fallout what it may. And I say nothing of the backbreaking task Dom James took about him in deciding the top-to-bottom renovation of Gethsemani's antiquated firetrap buildings.

This is where I should perhaps give expression to another, I think rather well-founded, hunch I have had whenever mention is made of Merton's difficulties with Dom Sortais and Dom Gillet. I feel that both of them, along with Dom James, were under considerable ecclesiastical and even political pressure to 'silence' Fr Louis from writing on

9. *Faith and Violence* (South Bend, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1968).

10. *Conjectures of a Guilty Bystander* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1966).

social issues, especially war and peace at a time in the 'cold war' when these issues were internationally divisive. Was it a question of who would 'tie the bell on the cat' as having sufficient moral power and authority to make Merton desist? Dom Gabriel was credited with having 'silenced' Merton, but was he acting entirely on his own? Despite his military and patriotic background and that of his secretary, Fr Clement, I think he acted under orders from a 'higher authority', both ecclesiastical and ultimately political.

Montaldo: Was there really ever any such phenomenon as 'Mertonism' in European and American monasteries?

Bourget: As far as I know, not during Merton's lifetime. His writings seem to have appealed more to secular readers and this increasingly as Merton set aside typically monastic and spiritual writing to concentrate on social issues and Eastern religious topics like Zen. *The Seven Storey Mountain* had a considerable impact on American Catholic youth and, it is said, accounted for many vocations to the monastic life, expectedly enough to Gethsemani. I myself, however, know of only a few cases where the scores who entered my own community in the heady 1940s and 1950s had previously read the book. As to the European monasteries, to speak of English-speaking ones, I have found only minimal interest in Merton on the rank and file level and, in the many French-speaking ones, hardly more.

Montaldo: In what specific ways did Merton influence the Cistercian Order during his own lifetime? If he had an influential role in your mind, would you describe it as 'prophetic'?

Bourget: That is quite a tall order! Beginning most generally and superficially, my overall impression is that from the start of Merton's writing career our monks' reactions, whether they were seniors or juniors in the monastic life, have run the whole gamut from enthusiastic endorsement to complete indifference and that for widely differing reasons. More particularly Fr Louis did have an immediate and direct contact with the Novice Masters in a meeting at Gethsemani held on 6 October 1964. The gist of Merton's remarks to them on that occasion he later published in an article he entitled '*Conversatio Morum*' which appeared in *Cistercian Studies Quarterly*.¹¹ Also on that occasion, which coincided with a Regional Meeting of the US supe-

riors which I attended as American Definitor, Merton gave one talk to the entire group, on *aggiornamento*, of which I remember only his plea that we *not* set aside Latin and Gregorian Chant in favor of the vernacular and of newly composed melodies, not even in favor of tried and true Anglican chant with which he said he was quite familiar from his early days at school in England. As to the chant, the American houses, as we know, disregarded his plea and jettisoned both Latin and Gregorian as soon as they possibly could. They are only now emerging, if slowly and partially, from the doldrums that ensued from this hasty and ill-prepared changeover.

There may be other instances, but I know of one important instance in which Merton did influence the Order's thinking and acting and continues to do so now. I refer to the possibility of monks being allowed to live as hermits. The fact that the new Constitutions (1990) of the Order (nos. 13 and 36) provide 'in extraordinary cases, [monks] to lead an eremitical life' either alongside the Community or even 'outside the monastic property' is certainly due to Merton's writings, which prepared the ground for this. More directly Merton influenced Dom James who raised the whole topic at several General Chapters. I was reading recently an opinion that the eremitical movement in the Order peaked in the 1970s due to Merton's influence but has since bottomed out. The writer went on to say that the whole movement seems to have been more positive than negative.¹²

An important consequence of this hermit movement for the rank and file monks, who while not called to the eremitical life felt increasingly suffocated by the excesses of our common life, night and day, was the use of private rooms over common dormitories. Merton may not have foreseen this precise departure from many centuries of exaggerated togetherness. Merton's idea of 'privacy' was freedom to commune with nature by solitary walks through the fields and woods. Thanks to Merton, at least at Gethsemani, this heretofore impossibility was gradually introduced and encouraged into the Order before the question of greater solitude and silence was linked to the use of individual rooms. Many agree with me that this development, rather than the chance to become hermits, was perhaps the most spiritually and psychologically beneficial measure taken by the Order in updating its Constitutions. This was due to Merton's influence 'trickling down' directly and indirectly.

Finally, in connection with the Order, I cannot securely say that Merton remains influential on how the Cistercian life is lived today.

11. *Cistercian Studies Quarterly* 1 (1966), pp. 130-44 (130-31).

12. Minutes of Region of the Isles Regional Meeting 1998, p. 23 n. 19.

Thirty years have sped by since he died and even longer since he stopped writing on subjects of relevance to the Order. Merton's undoubted influence has been increasingly 'outside the walls'. I find this unfortunate as I believe Merton was definitely a 'prophet' but perhaps more for the church and the world at large than for his own Order. I do need to add that there have been many 'rising stars' in our ranks to take up the cudgels of change, if that isn't too strong a word, and to evolve Merton's thinking about the Order's admittedly much-needed updating. That some of these would-be 'new Mertons' have not been *à la hauteur* [of the stature] of Fr Louis in my estimation is neither here nor there, but I do confess to mixed feelings as to the trends some of these latter-day Mertons have started, setting up this monastery or that as a center for this or that, unwittingly overshadowing what all our monasteries are expected to excel in as places to welcome sincere seekers of God according to the authentic Cistercian charism. In his earliest and specifically monastic and spiritual writings Merton never indulged in such 'specialization'. He was too concerned about underlying Benedictine values as fundamental to our Cistercian life and spirit. Such thinking on my part, however, may only mean that by this time in my own long monastic 'career' I am... *dépassé*.

Montaldo: Which of Merton's writings, in your opinion, will have lasting value for Cistercians and for those leading a monastic life in general?

Bourget: Trappists have always prided themselves in belonging to 'a contemplative Order', but just what they meant by contemplative was difficult to define in practice. To Merton more than to any other Trappist of this century belongs the credit for exploring the inner meaning of the words 'contemplation' and 'contemplative'.

Among his writings dealing with the monastic life as such I myself would single out his very short, happily reprinted, treatise *Basic Principles of Monastic Spirituality*.¹³ What Merton lays down there as being basic has been proven to be so and could serve as a *vade mecum* for every monk's entire life. This text also provides the principles for a probing self-examination at critical junctures of one's monastic life. I also believe that his equally brief essay on *Spiritual Direction*,¹⁴ put out

13. *Basic Principles of Monastic Spirituality* (Springfield: Templegate, 1996 [1957]).

14. *Spiritual Direction and Meditation* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1960).

as a lovely vest-pocket-sized book by Collegeville [Liturgical Press] years ago, could hardly be improved upon.

His translations of Dom Jean Baptiste Chautard's *The Soul of the Apostolate*¹⁵ in 1946 and *The Spirit of Simplicity*,¹⁶ a translation and commentary on a text by St Bernard, remain, because of their content, peripherally important. Merton's juvenile foray into monastic hagiography, *What Are These Wounds?* and *Exile Ends in Glory*, were not good. His single monographs on Cistercian saints are better. I am thinking of those on St Robert of Molesme, St Alberic and St Stephen Harding which have only recently been republished in *Cistercian Studies Quarterly* as part of the ninth centenary of the founding of Cîteaux. Merton's so-called 'Postulant's Guides' still have value.¹⁷ One in this genre, *Cistercian Life*, was gladly adopted in its day by practically all of the US monasteries and quite a few European English-speaking ones for their vocational literature.

Then came a book that has always reminded me of Peter Anson's *In Quest of Solitude: Merton's The Silent Life* in which he attempted to describe several monastic Orders which have marked solitary and eremitical characteristics.¹⁸ This attempt was not Merton's forte either, in my opinion. Anyone reading between the lines could guess where Merton's own sympathies already lay. He was in fact toying with the idea of transferring to one of these Orders. Be it said in passing that Merton was not alone in this, for many young Trappists, overwhelmed by the back-breaking grind of 'regular exercises' and a common life pushed to extremes, had cast longing if unenlightened eyes toward the Carthusians and the Camaldolese, the grass being always greener on the other side of the fence!

More important than all of these by far, in my opinion, were his books treating specifically of prayer, the inner life and of contemplation. *The Climate of Monastic Prayer* is perennially valuable as are

15. Dom Jean Baptiste Chautard, *The Soul of the Apostolate* (trans. Thomas Merton; Abbey of Gethsemani, 1946).

16. Dom Jean Baptiste Chautard, *The Spirit of Simplicity* (trans. Thomas Merton; Abbey of Gethsemani, 1948).

17. 'Saint Robert: Founder of Cîteaux', *Cistercian Studies Quarterly* 33.1 (1998), pp. 5-12; 'Saint Alberic: Second Abbott of Cîteaux' (ed. Patrick Hart), *Cistercian Studies Quarterly* 33.2 (1998), pp. 125-35; 'Saint Stephen Harding: Third Abbot of Cîteaux and Founder of the Cistercian Order' (ed. Patrick Hart), *Cistercian Studies Quarterly* 33.3 (1998), pp. 265-76.

18. Peter F. Anson, *In Quest of Solitude* (London: J.M. Dent, 1932); Thomas Merton, *The Silent Life* (New York: Farrar, Straus & Cudahy, 1957).

Thoughts in Solitude, Seeds of Contemplation and *Bread in the Wilderness*.¹⁹ I could easily extend this list of his most valuable literature for monks. I also consider 'The Inner Experience', published as a series of four articles in *Cistercian Studies Quarterly*, of seminal importance for us.²⁰

To speak even more personally, two of Merton's books moved me profoundly for many reasons: *Conjectures of a Guilty Bystander* and *Faith and Violence*, especially the chapter on 'Events and Pseudo-Events'. I want to read you one of my favorite passages from *Conjectures*: 'At the center of my being is a point of pure nothingness which is untouched by sin and by illusion, a point of pure truth, a point or spark which belongs entirely to God, which is never at our disposal, from which God disposes of our lives, which is inaccessible to the fantasies of our own mind or the brutalities of our own will. This little point of nothingness and of absolute purity is *the pure glory of God in us*.'²¹ This is magnificent, isn't it? I think Merton's importance is to have embodied the advice of his friend, the French philosopher Jacques Maritain, which I can only paraphrase: 'None of us will ever move beyond the mechanical, institutional and legalistic formulations of "faith" and get to the actual content of faith unless and until we gain a contemplative experience of existence.' In this sense Merton really did make an honest, instructive, life-long attempt to go beyond the shadow and disguise of the contemplative life to its very heart.

There is no doubt in my mind that of all our writers during the years of the Order's *aggiornamento* Merton correctly placed emphasis on the strictly contemplative nature and mission of our Cistercian Order of the Strict Observance. Whether our Capitular Fathers realized it or not at the time that they chose the theme of the nature of our contemplative life for a recent General Chapter, it was the influence of Merton 'trickling down' to them that made them finally set aside the endless discussions that led to the adopted draft of the revised Constitutions and begin concentrating on what really made and still makes the Order 'tick'. I have always said that what makes the Roman Catholic Church the True Church of Christ on earth is its

19. *The Climate of Monastic Prayer* (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 1981); *Thoughts in Solitude* (New York: Farrar, Straus & Cudahy, 1958); *Seeds of Contemplation* (New York: New Directions, 1949); *Bread in the Wilderness* (New York: New Directions, 1953).

20. *The Inner Experience*, unpublished manuscript serialized and edited by Patrick Hart, OCSO, in *Cistercian Studies Quarterly* 18–19 (1983–84).

21. *Conjectures of a Guilty Bystander*, p. 158.

mystical life. John Paul II has recently written of the Church that her structures and organizations are 'at the service of the mystery. The Church, as the mystical Body of Christ, penetrates and embraces all of us. The spiritual, mystical dimensions of the Church are much greater than any sociological statistics could every possibly show...'²² For me our Order has no *raison d'être* divorced from its *intense contemplative life*.

Montaldo: Were you ever enthusiastic for the writing of Gethsemani's 'other author', Fr Raymond Flanagan?

Bourget: As is the case with Merton and Dom James, in Raymond Flanagan we are dealing with another strong personality who reflected his cultural and religious backgrounds, ones altogether different from Merton's. By his own admission Father Raymond's writing appealed to a different class of reader than Merton's and many of his books are still fondly remembered to this day. *The Man Who Got Even with God*²³ made a tremendous impression. I confess that it took me all of four tries before I was able to read though *The Silent Spire Speaks*²⁴ sent to me by Dom James. My last and best memory of Fr Raymond is seeing him smiling broadly as he huffed and puffed while pushing a heavy wheelbarrow full of debris from the gutted third floor of the front wing at Gethsemani. He had just undergone cancer surgery, too! This was the real Fr Raymond! All of which proves another point I made earlier: there is no such thing, to my mind, as a 'classic Trappist vocation'. If there were, a candidate with a history like Raymond Flanagan's would have been rejected out of hand; but then, would Thomas James Merton have been accepted either?

Montaldo: 1998 marked the fiftieth anniversary of the publication of *The Seven Storey Mountain*. Could you recall for me two or three popular spiritual writers of the immediate past who are no longer read today? I'm thinking of writers like Fr Frederic Faber, Dom Columba Marmion and Bishop Fulton Sheen and wonder what is it about their writing that faded. I ask this only as background to your judging whether Merton's writing will have a longer-term survivability well into the next century.

22. Quoted in Robert Moynihan, 'A Time for Holiness', *Inside the Vatican*, October 1998, p. 5.

23. *The Man Who Got Even with God* (Milwaukee: Bruce, 1941).

24. *The Silent Spire Speaks* (Milwaukee: Bruce, 1966).

Bourget: Fr Faber's works, starting with *All for Jesus*,²⁵ attained wide circulation despite a florid style, a mixture of erudition and poetic fancies. His style must have appealed to the popular devotional piety of Victorian times and even that of early twentieth-century Catholics, but I was never drawn to him and wondered how an Oxford Movement Anglican convert like Faber could possibly have 'gone over' so completely to that style of writing, so different from the classical English devotional works of the Anglican divines like Lancelot Andrewes. Why have the works by Faber's contemporary and fellow Oratorian John Henry Newman continued to be so popular and esteemed while Faber's are antique and unread? There are other factors at work than simply new trends and styles in the field of spiritual literature as there have always been in architecture, music, dress, etc. Unlike Newman, Faber's devotional works were strongly inspired by a 'dolorism' made popular by the otherwise excellent spiritual works of the Cardinal de Berulle, who stressed the Cross, renunciation, mortification, penance, sacrifice and reparation. And then, quite apart from his exemplary English style of writing, what in my eyes makes Newman's works classics is not just that they remain in print, but that they have a perennial relevance to all God-seekers of every age. Newman was daring the rank and file Church of England hearers at first, and all would-be sincere Christians later, to enter deeply within themselves and confront the God and Christ of theological faith, hope and love in their own 'point vierge' of self-consciousness. As did Merton.

Dom Columba Marmion, OSB (1858–1923) wrote three works which in his day were considered 'classics of spirituality'. *Christ, the Life of the Soul*, *Christ in his Mysteries* and *Christ, the Ideal of the Monk*.²⁶ When these appeared in English in the 1930s they were required reading both in the Refectory, at Compline, in the Novitiate, and were constantly being quoted in Chapter talks. Both the style and mode of presentation, however, in which the French original comes through the translation, turns off the modern reader. I mean especially Marmion's mustering of texts, whether scriptural or liturgical, to make a point. There is a constant cantilena of Latin texts left untranslated. Marmion needs editing for the modern reader. Writers on the spiritual and monastic life today adopt a more down-to-earth

25. *All for Jesus* (Westminster, MD: Newman, 1956 [1855]).

26. *Christ, the Life of the Soul* (St Louis: Herder, 1922 [1917]); *Christ in his Mysteries* (St Louis: Herder, 1939 [1919]); *Christ, the Ideal of the Monk* (St Louis: Herder, 1926 [1922]).

and personalized approach that is foreign to Marmion's works. It is a pity in a way, so far as monks are concerned, for Marmion is a monk speaking to monks about spiritual topics no less vitally important today as they were then.

Fulton Sheen's works are mostly transcriptions of very popular radio and television talks aimed at a wide audience, what the French would call *une oeuvre de vulgarisation* [a popular work]. He, too, is dated both by reason of the content of his writings and, even more perhaps, by the didactic manner of his presentation, more suited to be heard rather than read.

With just these three examples before us of those whose popularity has waned, I still would answer the question of Merton's surviving viability with a convinced Yes! In varying ways and degrees Merton touched a responsive chord in innumerable people in the past as much as he does contemporaneously and will in the future. He speaks our language and fearlessly tackles life issues with which we all must wrestle. The moral principles he stressed in social issues will always be valid and applicable. *The Seven Storey Mountain's* never having gone out of print is proof enough that Merton is a 'classic'. What Merton recounted continues to elicit not only interest in but also assent to the deep yearning for spiritual wholeness that motivated his life-long quest for God.

Montaldo: Are there Cistercians writing today whom you believe are influencing the Order and monasticism?

Bourget: Many Cistercians are writing and having influence beyond the Order and monasticism, but since you have narrowed the field to monasticism, I'll name only two monastic writers without meaning to discriminate against a field of others. Fr Michael Casey of Tarrawarra Abbey in Australia was commissioned by the OSCO General Chapter to write a work which might 'help us to use the occasion of the ninth centenary of the foundation of Cîteaux as an invitation to reflect more deeply on our Cistercian heritage'. Fr Casey responded by writing *Exordium: A Program of Reflection and Study on the Values of the Cistercian Reform*. This is a monumental in-house program comprised of ten multi-page 'units' in which Fr Casey helps us programmatically 'to hear what the Spirit is saying today to our communities and to our Order'. I am certain Merton would approve Fr Michael's work.

I would also mention only one other present-day Cistercian writer who continues to use his undoubtedly deep insights into the spiritual life for the good of the Order, Dom Andre Louf, Abbot-Emeritus (he

resigned in 1997 after more than 30 years in office) of Mont-des-Cats in France. All of his works so far have been translated into English.²⁷

Montaldo: How often did you personally converse with Merton? Is it difficult for you to make distinctions between your responses to him as a person and your responses to his writing and influence?

Bourget: I met with Fr Louis on a number of occasions on my visits to Gethsemani during the years 1958 to 1968, when he died. My conversations with him I remember as short. The first occasion must have been on my very first visit to Gethsemani in May/June 1959. I remember sending him a personal message from the Abbey of Tamié in Savoy, France, on 16 September 1959, in which I addressed him as 'Dearest Father Louis', a liberty I would not have allowed myself had we not struck it off from the start. Naturally, after he became a full-time hermit on 20 August 1965, we met only accidentally, like the time I was browsing in Gethsemani's impeccably kept library and Fr Louis came over from the hermitage to say private Mass. The directness and openness so evident in all his writings characterized all of our short meetings. He gave one his complete attention, the mark in my eyes of someone who is not only polite, but also truly humble.

In my answer to your second (loaded!) question, again, I have spoken already of his intellectual humility and his sense of humor. I recall one instance of this as I was addressing the Gethsemani community in Chapter with Fr Louis sitting only a few feet away from me. I had been reading his *The Wisdom of the Desert*²⁸ prior to my arrival. Before quoting a pertinent 'saying' I voiced in a frank way my exasperation with the length of the author's *prolegomenon* to the Fathers' 'wisdom', having wanted to get to the actual content of the book. No one laughed more heartily to my off-the-cuff barb than Fr Louis himself!

It is not at all difficult for me to make distinctions between my personal knowledge of him and my assessment of his writing and its influence. I have, however, consistently made the point that those

27. *The Cistercian Alternative* (trans. Nivard Kinsella, OCSO; Dublin: Gill & Macmillan, 1983); *The Cistercian Way* (trans. Nivard Kinsella, OCSO; Kalamazoo: Cistercian Publications, 1983); *The Message of Monastic Spirituality* (trans. Luke Stevens; New York: Desclée de Brouwer, n.d.); *Teach Us to Pray: Learning a Little about God* (trans. Herbert Hoskins; Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1974); and *Turning to Grace: The Quest for God* (trans. John Vriend; Kalamazoo: Cistercian Publications, 1992).

28. *The Wisdom of the Desert* (New York: New Directions, 1960).

who only 'knew' Merton from his writings perforce missed one essential element of his make-up, precisely the humanness of the man, with all his quirks and idiosyncrasies. I am aware that some that were his novices or scholastics maintain that Fr Louis' true thought is to be found in his writings and there alone, but I feel differently. Now that his Journals have been published, practically unexpurgated (a few expurgations in Volume 6), everyone can see the human facets I am referring to, facets not always evident in his writings.

If you really wish to know Merton from start to finish, you should read all seven volumes of his Journals.

Montaldo: As one who has read all seven volumes of the Journals, what evidence have they provided you for judging Merton's monastic career?

Bourget: I would rather speak of his life as it evolved from the time he entered the monastic state until his death imposed closure upon it. A monk has no 'career' in the ordinary sense of that word. As Bishop Kallistos Ware puts it, undoubtedly paraphrasing an ancient monastic father, 'each day the monk's task is only to fall and pick himself up and continue on his way'. This is clearly abundant in the Journals. What is evident to a careful reader is that, from start to finish, Merton was 'truly seeking God' according to his own light and his own grace and, perhaps unbeknownst to himself, was approaching the Source of Light itself.

The Journals will have a different message for every reader, naturally enough, but from my own vantage point I would recommend them to monks, or any reader, entering upon a mid-life crisis. In the Journals a reader encounters someone who was naïve enough to write about himself in such depth and make no bones about both his temptations and his failures to live up to the ideals set out in his own works on the monastic life. Yet he ever set these ideals before his eyes and picked himself up from his failures and continued on his way God-ward. That he is one of those monks who 'succeeded' is borne out for me in that he rests quietly 'between two Foxes' [Dom James and his brother Bernard Fox] in the monastic cemetery at Gethsemani.