

## A Haven for 'Homeless Religious Minds': 1996 Bibliographic Review

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In the wake of the sensationalism created by the publication of the first of seven volumes of Thomas Merton's journals last year, readers have set about the task of digesting four volumes of Merton material which arrived during 1996. While three of them are the journals (covering 1941-1952; 1952-1960; and 1960-1963), the gem among these publications as the year 1996 met 1997 is the modest but sterling collection of letters exchanged by Czeslaw Milosz and Merton between 1958 and 1968.

After assessing the merits of all this new primary material, our attention will shift to one new book about Merton, the sole contribution of this caliber during the past year. But a wide spectrum of critical essays from various journals and periodicals rounds out this year's bibliographic survey, ranging from an interest in Art and Spirituality to Merton's "Christ-Consciousness." A new bibliographic tool for reading Merton's five volumes of published letters is also noted.

### I

It is disarming to recognize that Michael Mott's biography of Thomas Merton will soon be fifteen years old. Yet, as time passes, Mott's painstaking labor of love proves itself still without peer in Merton studies. It was in the pages of *The Seven Mountains of Thomas Merton* that we first appreciated the nature of the monk's correspondence with the Polish linguist and literary critic Czeslaw Milosz. Midway in Mott's biography he described their letters as "[t]he most

vital exchange" for Merton in the early 1960s. Only now, with the early release of *Striving Towards Being* in late 1996 (although the book bears the 1997 date) and publication of *both* sides of this correspondence, can we begin to fathom the deep impression—perhaps the singularly transforming impact—which Milosz made on Merton and his vocation as a monk-literary figure. Readers of *The Merton Annual* deserve an immediate alert to this volume and its import for understanding the twentieth century's most celebrated monk.

A large selection of Merton's letters to Milosz were included in the fourth volume of selections from Merton's letters, *The Courage for Truth*. However, the other side of the correspondence from the recipient of the 1980 Nobel Prize in Literature has, until now, remained unpublished. Robert Faggen, professor of English literature at Claremont McKenna College in California, has edited a handsome volume to remedy that missing dimension. In the process, he has also given us a new perspective and context in which to appreciate Merton's mind and heart as the monk submitted to Milosz's challenge, his scrutiny, and his encouragement. I do not know of a more important exchange of correspondence in Merton's life.

The final line from Milosz's last letter (January 15, 1968) measures well the circumference of the two writers' exchange: "My prediction—and I wish I were wrong—is that the number of homeless religious minds will be rapidly increasing." The Polish literateur wrote before both the momentous demise of the Communist empire and the election of a Polish pope in 1979. Nevertheless, he proves prescient as he continues: "I advised Turowicz [a friend] to start a new heresy in Poland, consisting in an exact reversal of the existing trends, namely, to cling to Latin and to the traditional liturgy and to drop any concerns with sex, the pill, etc. But no heresy will come from Poland" (173). It is this sense of spiritual inertia and a lament over the alienation of religious minds that forges the strong kinship between Milosz and Merton throughout the decade of letter writing.

Merton initiated this correspondence by an enthusiastic letter brimming with questions about his Polish friend's "remarkable book" *The Captive Mind* and its analysis of the Marxist totalitarian siege in Eastern Europe. Merton is quick to point out "[t]he lamentable, pitiable emptiness of so much Catholic writing, including much of my own" in his second paragraph, and anticipates some "third position" which would refuse to be subject "to the pressures of the two massive groups ranged against each other in the world. There is wonderful

self-deprecation as Merton admits the need to break out of "my own particular kind of shell." A vintage Merton sentence, replete with his own "hidden wholeness" is voiced in this initial letter: "One thing I do know," writes Merton, "is that anyone who is interested in God Who is Truth, has to break out of the ready-made shells of the 'captive' positions that offer their convenient escapes from freedom—one who loves freedom must go through the painful experience of seeking it, perhaps without success" (4).

Milosz eventually ventured to criticize Merton's romanticism in a February 1960 letter: "Every time you speak of Nature [in *The Sign of Jonas*], it appears as soothing, rich in symbols, as a veil or a curtain. You do not pay much attention to torture and suffering in Nature" (64). (Mott observes that in Merton, nature is never "red in tooth and claw" [357].) This led Milosz to suggest that Merton might write sequels to *Thoughts in Solitude* which would explore "the terrible questions"—making him something of a contemporary Paschal, a voice his Polish correspondent suggests is desperately needed. Milosz proved to be the catalyst when he challenged Merton:

Now, when there is such chaos in the world of arts and letters, the most sane, intelligent (and of best literary style) are works of French theologians. They perform an important and lasting task. We are groping—and I say it basing upon what young Catholics in Poland write—towards completely new images permitting perhaps to grasp religion again as a personal vision. I do not invite you to write theological treatises but much can be accomplished, it seems to me, through literary criticism for instance (142).

As early as his second letter to Milosz, dated February 28, 1959, Merton had raised the issue of redefining spirituality after mentioning a copy of his "Letter to an Innocent Bystander" enclosed for his new Polish acquaintance:

[I]t is unbearable for me to feel that I may have let myself get too far away from the actual problems of my time in a kind of pious detachment that is an indefensible luxury. There are all sorts of complicated angles to this, though. There is something much too mental and abstract, something too parochial about a great deal of Catholic thought and Catholic spirituality today. . . . So much of it all in the head. And in politics it is even worse: all the formulas, the gestures, the animosities, and the narrowness (16–17).

Merton also speaks candidly about his own misgivings over *Thoughts in Solitude*, remarking, "these notes were revised and dressed up by me and became what I take to be a little commercial and hence false." With an uncommon vulnerability, Merton asks Milosz for his appraisal, even inquiring whether *Thoughts* "bores you completely" and seems "completely alien, bourgeois etc." (19). In the same vein, he seeks perspective on his writing by asking Milosz about his "Letter to an Innocent Bystander"—"tell me if it is really a piece of presumptuous complacency" (21).

This same early letter ends with Merton voicing an animated faith in the paschal mystery:

Milosz—life is on our side. The silence and the Cross which we know are forces that cannot be defeated. In silence and suffering, in the heartbreaking effort to be honest in the midst of dishonesty (most of all our *own* dishonesty), in all these is victory. It is Christ who drives us through a darkness to a light of which we have no conception and which can only be found by passing through apparent despair. Everything has to be tested. . . . Much has to be lost. Much in us has to be killed, even much that is best in us. But Victory is certain (19–20).

Milosz's reply, three months later on Easter Saturday, gravitates to the spiritual struggle of the writer: "Writing is suspect since love of truth can go together with an urge to oppose our 'I' to the world." He warns of the constant "danger of self-delusion as to our importance" and defers to Merton-the-monk having "to resolve [what I am saying] in the first years of your monastic life" (24–5). He ends this lengthy letter alluding to a friend's reproach "that I never write what I really think, that I am a dialectician, always speaking through the hat, perhaps a coward" (30).

Six months later Merton speaks again, referring to our "apparent despair." His reflections follow remarks about a Polish novelist whose work Milosz had sent him. Merton responds:

If [the novelist] were not nearly in despair there would be something the matter with him: his plight is a sign that he is at least healthy enough to react. . . . We should all feel near to despair in some sense because this semi-despair is the normal form taken by hope in a time like ours. Hope without any sensible or tangible evidence on which to rest. Hope in spite of the sickness that fills us. Hope married to a firm refusal to accept any palliatives or any-

thing that cheats hope by pretending to relieve apparent despair. . . . In the end it comes to the old story that we are sinners, but that is our hope because sinners are the ones who attract to themselves the infinite compassion of God (52).

Mott nonetheless has faulted Merton for having missed Milosz's point. But he has also alerted us to the heart of the exchange summarized in the two excerpts just read. Milosz had written in the second year of their exchange that the usefulness of a book like *The Sign of Jonas* was "limited for somebody who is seriously interested in 'anatomy of faith'. . . ." But he suggests a different dilemma: "What are the contents of faith, in any case those translatable into notions and images[?]" He appreciates how Merton's diary describes "your internal country in its results" but faults it for lapsing into the "mysterious." There is, Milosz reminds, a world of difference between the diary's "noting" and the process of "distilling" (60).

A new question comes from Milosz: "[A] reader . . . is eager to learn (gradually) what is the *image* of the world in Thomas Merton[?]" He nudges Merton further, describing his journals as narrative "sequences"; but Milosz speaks for readers ready to follow Merton "in five volumes through a very vision of the world redeemed by Christ." He then gently scolds the monk: "In how many [of your] books [can we] find it if we exclude books of devotion?" Milosz quickly begs Merton not to interpret this "as an attempt to convince you to become a theologian in the Dominican tradition. . . ."

You created a new dimension thanks to images, you change a monastery into something else than it was in the literature up to the [current] times. How to combine two contradictory exigencies I do not know (62).

The context of this challenge for Merton is Milosz's remark that the novels of Graham Greene and François Mauriac "belong to the past" because "in them religion is added, as a *Deus ex machina*." Milosz wanted of Merton a way to engage the ultimate questions of theology: the Problem of Evil and Suffering; the Question of Guilt; the Question of Institutionalized Christianity. But he awaits answers not in the abstract but "on the border between intellect and imagination, a border," he admits, "so rarely explored today in religious thinking: we lack an image of the world. . . ." (61). So, Czesław Milosz had reciprocated the sudden intimacy of a kindred spirit by pointing out the limitations of Merton's writing style and its devotional narrowness. More importantly, he had

now summoned Merton to find a new means for groping towards new images of the world, "to grasp religion again as a personal vision."

There is much more to be mined from the rich veins of *Striving Towards Being*. Both writers share an enthusiasm for Simone Weil's life and literary works; they exchange reflections on Pasternak, with Milosz offering a Polish perspective on Merton's unbridled enthusiasm for the Russian; the Pole wants to convince the American to comment on Camus' *The Fall*, describing it as "a very ambiguous book, . . . a cry of despair and a treatise on Grace (absent)" (65). Added to this literary potpourri is an undertow of political conversation to explore how protest and witness are to be engaged with integrity by the spiritually awakened writer.

In some way these letters anticipate the openness and mutual spiritual direction which are evident in the Merton-Rosemary Ruether correspondence, although she never ventures to be as forthcoming and vulnerable as Milosz in his letters. No one who makes an effort to understand the complexity of Thomas Merton can neglect to pore over, savor, and return again and again to *Striving Towards Being*. One of Merton's last letters to Milosz admits that "my 'happiness' does not depend on any institution or establishment" and that friends like his Polish counterpart comprise his "'Church' of friends" who are far more important than any institution" (175). This volume presents a unique segment of his correspondence wherein Merton himself chronicles the development of his own "homeless religious mind." It is a conversation exchanged by intimates without peers.

We are blessed with a bounty in the more than twelve hundred pages of three new Merton journals—the second, third, and fourth in the projected seven-volume series from HarperCollins, San Francisco. Editors Jonathan Montaldo, Lawrence Cunningham, and Victor A. Kramer have untangled Merton's dense script onto the screens of their pc's and delivered texts delicately edited with only a trace of their own annotations (although readers would undoubtedly have benefited from more signs and interpretive keys on their part). I found myself reading first the indexes for each volume, gaining a quick preview of the names, titles, places, and even some themes that preoccupy Merton in these journals that span 1941–1952 (vol. II, *Entering the Silence*); 1952–1960 (volume III, *A Search for Solitude*); and 1960–1963 (vol. IV, *Turning Toward the World*).

How to attempt a "review" of the Merton journals? What impresses me most about these unalloyed pages is how, over time, they

record and leave footprints of the various changes in his spirit and psyche. All these journals serve as the unfailing barometer of Thomas Merton's soul. At times they ramble, are tedious, or they volley ideas and impressions so quickly that their pages leave the reader either dizzy or disoriented. For all the piecemeal nature of the genre, they bear a remarkable fluidity. I convince myself that any writer's journal resists the reviewer's reductionism and flair for geiger countering the unsuspected factoid or the heretofore concealed peccadillo. My task, therefore, is more to identify succinctly the tenor and bent of each of the volumes in the hope of encouraging readers to immerse themselves in these pages.

Having read *The Sign of Jonas*, one cannot but begin *Entering the Silence* without some preconception of what lies ahead here. All the enthusiasm of a romance with the newly professed monk spills from these pages. But somehow Merton avoids (in the main) the saccharine that might make his zeal off-putting. I admit that I found Jonathan Montaldo's introduction distasteful for two reasons. First, while he rightly points to Merton's cultivating the spiritual discipline of writing, he unfelicitously chooses his words when he claims that Thomas Merton therefore "made himself God's bait." I cannot think of a description less compatible with the spirituality of Thomas Merton. But I found it even more condescending to be advised: "As you can, Reader, doubt everything you believe you already know about Thomas Merton and entrust yourself to his journals with an open heart." Such a willing suspension of disbelief might be a fine rhetorical flourish in Coleridge, but here it serves to render the reader less intelligent. The great value of these journals will be for the *connections* readers (and scholars) make to themes, developments, and revisions in Merton's story.

The argument with himself which Merton publicly revealed in *The Sign of Jonas* is lengthened in these ample pages. While the first volume of the journals, *Run to the Mountain*, may have left the impression of Merton constantly whining, this second volume shows how tedious he becomes over the complaints of insomnia, his identity as a contemplative, and the flirtation with leaving Gethsemani for the Carthusians or some other new monastic venture, and the lure of solitude and a hermit's hut. I found Merton claustrophobic in this journal because he is so preoccupied with the piety surrounding his passage through the orders of subdeacon, deacon, and then priestly ordination. There are devout meditations on eucharistic spirituality to give all this some

ballast, of course. And I found the mention on December 8, 1948, about the noise of the guns at Fort Knox a premonition of the later Merton's writings about peacemaking and his "Rain and the Rhinoceros" essay, one of his most mature and lyric prose-poems. The election of Dom James Fox as abbot in the same year gives us a glance at first impressions (as well as some later potent and outspoken ones!) that will be confirmed throughout their relationship.

The effect of *Entering the Silence* is Merton's immersion in the ethos of the monastery, reading the Fathers and scripture, concerned with the domestic tasks of the monastery (such as arranging a "mosaic" of flowers for the altar), and trying to discover his own poverty and humility in a cenobitic community. The poet's eye always finds expression to relieve these pages' heaviness. Merton passes the bier for the monks' funerals and remarks about anticipation of its use, reveling in the fact that shirts stand on its gunwales and handkerchiefs are drying on it. Robert Speaight's visit to read from T. S. Eliot's *Murder in the Cathedral* is described with typical Merton superlatives: "a landmark in the history of Gethsemani." Knowing the later effect of Rilke upon Merton's own writing and poetry, it is fascinating to follow his initial enthusiasm for the German poet in *Entering the Silence*. Through 1952 Merton matures in his fervor as a monk. But the transition is already evident when he alludes to the monastery's growth, numbering 185 members of the community in July 1949.

Lawrence Cunningham's introduction to *A Search for Solitude* again affords us the clear, insightful sensitivity to Thomas Merton's vocation that we have come to expect from his own spiritual resources. There is a unique rapport with Merton in everything that Cunningham writes about him, and this important transitional journal is well suited to this editor's gifts as theologian and literateur. The fact that Merton writes ten books during the course of this journal makes it an especially rich resource, capturing the diverse interests as well as the frustrations for a monk whose life is growing ever more complex. Merton's role as master of scholastics and then master of novices crowds the entries of *A Search for Solitude*. In fact, the title itself aptly names his dilemma. These entries register the change with more notes recorded of his readings, more ideas and reflection upon them and less of the unrelieved introversion of the earlier journals.

So it was that Merton took his scholastics off to the woods. He also wedged his way into the confines of the tiny woodshed that he named St. Anne's hermitage, describing it as "a rampart between two

existences." The happiness of this solitude mingles with his reading in 1953 of Max Picard's *The World of Silence*. His poet's eye parenthetically (and ironically) juxtaposes the subtle detail: "A train of the old time sings in my present silence, at St. Anne's, where the watch without a crystal ticks on the little desk." I am distracted by Merton's whimsy and humor. At one point he records the "news" of malt carried by the south wind from a nearby Bardstown distillery. Another distraction comes for this reviewer with Merton's journal entry following a stop at Louisville's St. Martin's Church, a critique of liturgical space rendered with an artist-priest's eye. His first errand to Louisville's "gargantuan" GE plant leaves Merton meditating on the lifelessness of industry's modernity.

It is refreshing to find Merton's enthusiasm for Stephen Spender's poetry, his inquisitiveness over Dostoevsky as a religious novelist, his meeting with J. F. Powers in Minnesota. Merton unburdens himself of reflections on that trip to St. John's in Collegeville after his devastation by the encounter with psychiatrist Gregory Zilboorg who questioned his integrity and intentions as a monk. The last half of this journal seems dominated by Merton's dreams to bolt from Gethsemani and perhaps escape to Cuernavaca, Mexico. It makes for dramatic reading, with Jean Danielou as Merton's Dutch uncle. My surprise was in watching him take to his nurturing role as master of scholastics and novices. He has a tender but self-conscious sense of his serving as midwife to a generation of monks. It engulfs him at times. But now his prayers in the journals address his evolving sense of the deeper contemplative and solitary vocation vis-à-vis both a monastic commitment and his awakening social responsibility in the world. Some of this awakening we have already seen in the pages of *Conjectures of a Guilty Bystander*—an edited version of this journal and its sequel, the fourth volume. It is helpful to see both the Zilboorg episode and the Fourth and Walnut and Proverb visions in their original context. However, I suspect some readers will be deflated when they realize that Merton edited well his own work to deliver the polished relics we revere in the familiarly quoted later versions.

The potpourri of Heschl, Suzuki, Pasternak, Marcel, Ezra Pound, and Pablo Antonio Cuadra mingle with Marx, Gandhi, and Russia's Sputniks in these pages. Merton's horizons are shifting toward the southern hemisphere. Amid it all, Merton-the-poet punctuates the entries with sublime lines that dangle with a contemplative's allure: "A red-shouldered hawk screams insistently in a very blue sky."

Victor A. Kramer is especially well-equipped to edit this fourth and pivotal volume of Merton's journals, *Turning Toward the World*. The matrix of these three years and two months proves to be the monk's struggle about whether to cut back on his writing. Kramer's *Thomas Merton: Monk and Artist* (Kalamazoo: Cistercian Publications, 1984) remains a valuable interpretation of the public data; Kramer's essays there and in other presentations alertly have analyzed *The Sign of Jonas* and *Conjectures of a Guilty Bystander* for this very dynamic. What *Turning Toward the World* presents is Merton's hammering out his mature monastic identity on the anvil of social issues like war, civil rights, nonviolence, and the political impasse of a Cold War era.

This is the era in which Merton is censured and silenced by Cistercian authorities. Yet simultaneously the Church is launching the Second Vatican Council under the leadership of Pope John XXIII, a visionary who coaxes Catholics to unimagined social responsibility. Now, "the guns of Fort Knox pound incessantly" as Merton awakens to the U.S. government's use of U2 spy planes in Russia. Meanwhile, the hermitage had appeared in the guise of a meeting place for small ecumenical conferences—but it served more and more during these years as his solitary refuge. The questions for the mid-life monk were more complex and his answers were both more measured but nonetheless forthright—I like the way Kramer describes him as "much more willing to accept mystery on many levels." His introduction points out that the journals now more frequently record reflections about items he was reading. So the stimuli add momentum to the changes evidenced in Merton.

Whether it is reading Reinhold Neibuhr to deliver Merton from "my stupor" about politics, or just accepting the complexity of the world outside the monastery, Thomas Merton in the early 1960s was engaged in a new project. The Mount Olivet "hermitage" symbolized it. Nonetheless, Merton can still wrestle with the false self in passages like the entry of April 29, 1961: "My basic trouble: it is a strictly unchristian refusal . . . *The refusal to love those I do not consider worthy of love.*" For all the reading notes, the journals maintain their spiritual transparency. It is no wonder that Merton has written his Auschwitz poem and records the Mennonites in Kansas' request to publish it.

*The Catholic Worker* figures more prominently in Merton's life in these years of unrest. But the Milosz letters continue and offer him both challenge and solace. Perhaps most of all it is the interludes at the hermitage, in silence and immersed in nature's rhythms, that capture

the maturity and prayerful search of Merton in these years of *Turning Toward the World*. If you want some of this flavor then read the entry for Holy Saturday, 1963—it is vintage Merton. Part of that day is at the hermitage, watching sunrise and "the ceremony of the birds feeding in the dewy grass"; he laments "post-Cartesian technologism . . . separates man from the world and makes him a kind of little god in his own right"; and then he shifts to a visit from two Spanish families, especially admiring the fourteen or fifteen year old "overgrown" but "charming" daughter of one family. All this, and Merton's familiarity with medieval monastic sources, French scholarly studies, contemporary poets, and the fevers of the early 1960s political arena.

My only really disconcerting experience in reading these three new volumes came with the discovery that there are indeed gaps in Merton's journals, especially in volume II when he destroyed part of one of his early journals. Nonetheless, what these 1200+ pages afford will take us decades to absorb, appreciate, and fathom fully.

## II

During 1996 readers were virtually starving for book-length critical studies of Merton. Suzanne Zuercher, O.S.B., has therefore attracted considerable attention with *Merton: An Enneagram Profile* (Notre Dame, Ind.: Ave Maria Press, 1996). Her theme is "the spiritual path of Thomas Merton, a path he saw and walked from the standpoint of one of [the enneagram's] nine incarnations of human experience" (6). This is a well written, engaging volume. The text is salted with carefully selected Merton quotations and significant, if limited, excerpts from those who knew Merton-the-contemplative. Zuercher has authored two previous studies on the enneagram and brings to her interpretation of Merton a recognition that much criticism of it is "not lacking in foundation" because of "much of the superficiality of so-called enneagram study" and the trivialization of the enneagram. She offers the enneagram "as a genuine help to contemplation and not merely as a means to label people" (9).

Zuercher encourages readers unfamiliar with the enneagram not to turn away from the book, but to consider how our instinctive survival skills develop into ego-building compulsions. Then by admitting and acknowledging how these grow into exaggerated compulsions, Zuercher invites us to grow in contemplation, according to the enneagram's processes, and let go of the illusions or distortions and

reclaim for our lives our innate enneagram stance in proper proportion. The application of the "4" on the enneagram scale to the images, vocabulary and emphases of "his particular kind of personality," says Zuercher, "lets us into Merton's world with a nuance not found elsewhere" (7). That 4 profile includes characteristics such as the ego-romantic, the ego-melancholic, and the over-dramatizer. In turn, the 4 exhibits tendencies to exaggeration, whining, aloofness, and doubting the goodness of one's intrinsic being; this combines with restlessness, a sense of one's "special" status, discontented envy, self-criticism and self-accusation, manipulation, and manic-depression as the erratic range of his hope and despair. *Merton: An Enneagram Profile* unfolds how his life journey reconciled him with his limitations, not eliminating them but liberating his instincts from exaggeration and distortion.

In chapter two, "The Fundamental Sin: A Figure on His Own," Zuercher fixes upon a photograph of the young Merton. She is prompted by Michael Mott's attention to this photograph and his description of some of these very traits of the 4 profile which he described in his magisterial biography, *The Seven Mountains of Thomas Merton*. Rejection, privacy, and melancholy figure prominently in Zuercher's interpretation of this instant, capturing the three generations in an impromptu portrait. She concludes that Merton "became his own god, further alienating himself from himself and others" (36), thus the original reference in the title of this chapter and its etiology of his compulsions.

A methodological issue keeps surfacing for serious readers of *Merton: An Enneagram Profile*. Put bluntly: Does not the enneagram approach risk an exaggerated categorizing or stereotyping? There is no doubt that a judicious application of the insights from this field can further enlighten us about Merton's psyche and spirituality. But at what point does this schema contradict essential Merton principles such as human freedom and the *uniqueness* of the human person? Are there other more satisfactory ways of interpreting the contradictions one finds in Merton? At what point does exegesis give way to eisegesis? (On this score, Zuercher's fine excerpts from Merton could benefit from critical attention to the context of his writings; does a 1950s text like *The Sign of Jonas* need to be measured analytically against later, more mature works such as *Zen and the Birds of Appetite*, to say nothing of his late poetry?)

Could a momentary distraction or other factor explain the young Merton's posture and facial expression in the photograph on

which Zuercher (and Mott) places so much emphasis? Why is this photograph *the* definitive point of reference instead of the smiling, almost peek-a-boo glee of the young boy Thomas Merton standing at the door, a photograph featured in James Forest's *Living With Wisdom* (11)? Or the photograph (two pages later in Forest's book) of the two young brothers, Tom and John Paul, appearing quite happy and healthy? How do we interpret other, later Merton photographs, such as the serene Merton (with bottle in hand—is it a beer?) in the group photograph with psychiatrist Gregory Zilboorg when the two met at Collegetown in 1956—a devastating encounter as Merton himself recorded, but belied by the jovial camaraderie evidenced in this photograph? (Or, was this photograph antecedent to the private exchange with Zilboorg?) John Howard Griffin mused about his own experience of photographing Merton:

Merton showed no stiffening. I wondered if he would have masks, as nearly everyone does. How many films would I have to waste before I penetrated his masks and got to the man?

In some instances you would find it difficult to tell that [Ed Rice's and Eugene Meatyard's photographs] were photographs of the same man . . . they were so different. I have replied that all of them looked like him, or like aspects of him. Everything showed in his face. I tended to catch his face in repose, others often snapped their cameras in moments when his face was more animated. All of these views are perhaps necessary for a composite portrait of such a multifaceted man" [*A Hidden Wholeness: The Visual World of Thomas Merton* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1970) 38–9].

No wonder that the most famous photograph of Thomas Merton, Griffin's Mona Lisa-like portrait of the monk, captured the complex of moods and characteristics that defy a univocal interpretation. The same range of affect is captured in the striking photographs by Sibylle Akers which have appeared in more recent publications.

The virtue of Zuercher's book is the careful and compelling case she builds in chapters 3–9 (Part Two), her enneagram's "4" profile of Merton: fearing conflict; the compulsive doer; a feeling of "specialness" and intensity; art as the life-search for meaning; dramatic intensity; the social without conflict or disapproval; despair and the awakening of feelings. Part Three ambitiously attempts to name the "Spiritual Geography" of Merton. Although its various chapters prove

uneven, Zuercher explores important themes such as "homecoming" death and rebirth, and Merton's quest for wholeness and unity. Part IV investigates Merton's relationships including the monastic community, friends and colleagues, and women friends. It is refreshing to see Merton emerge as human and yet loved in the context of both his brother monks' reminiscences and Zuercher's enneagram interpretation of his mid-life crisis affair with Margie, the young nurse. Part V is especially valuable for the chapter on "The True Self," the theme that is the fulcrum of Merton's spirituality and which Zuercher weaves throughout her book.

Among the reels of taped Merton conferences with the novices, I recall one particular session when the master was discouraging his charges from psychologically analyzing one another. "Don't try to figure out what makes *that* guy tick," Merton scolded. He recommended rather that a monastic community survives by seeing the glory of God shine through one other. In effect, Merton was skeptical about "systems" such as the enneagram. No doubt someday someone will discover that somewhere else in his canon Merton uttered a word of openness to the enneagram. Perhaps it will be in the context of his study of Sufi mysticism (although Zuercher herself discredits claims that the enneagram originated among the Sufis). No matter. He resisted the univocal. And Merton readers will do well to resist any temptation to reduce him to the 4 profile as a definitive and final interpretation. Suzanne Zuercher's study is more subtle than such a simplistic verdict. However, too many will no doubt utilize this book in such a manner and thus misrepresent her work.

Zuercher's book begs for an index and one hopes that future editions will provide this necessary tool. In addition to my questions raised about her use of primary sources, Zuercher's neglect of David Cooper's provocative interpretation of Merton's childhood and later development in *Thomas Merton's Art of Denial* is a serious flaw in her work. While she acknowledges a debt to Erik Erikson's approach in her interpretation of Merton's life (8), she nowhere appraises or critiques Cooper's insightful application of Erikson in interpreting him. On the contrary, her uncritical acceptance of Robert G. Waldron's *Thomas Merton in Search of His Soul: A Jungian Perspective* needs to be balanced by the insights and caveats of Joann Wolski Conn [*The Merton Annual* 8 (1995) 258-62.] It would also be helpful for her to attend to Robert Daggy's pair of essays interpreting the young Merton and his turbulent relationship with his father in the years following his

mother's death. The editorial decision to publish this enneagram interpretation *before* and without reference to the publication of the seven volumes of Merton's journals leaves readers and scholars with a new challenge. It makes it all the more incumbent upon both popular and serious readers to appreciate Suzanne Zuercher's provocative contribution which will undoubtedly be a new benchmark in Merton studies.

A final critique: notwithstanding the strengths of Zuercher's book, there is an alarming absence of any specific attention to concerns that became synonymous with Thomas Merton, e.g., peacemaking, social justice, and racial equality. While she does acknowledge the "social" side of Merton's personality, it is the lack of concrete connection between the enneagram profile and this integral Merton outreach that exposes a serious weakness in the enneagram approach. It is not enough to make a passing comment that Merton knew Daniel Berrigan and complimented him by imitating his manner of dress—in enneagram fashion. Or that the Dalai Lama remarked on Merton's honest face. Far more substantive aspects of Merton remain unexplored and unacknowledged by the enneagram profile.

### III

Erlinda Paguio's "Thomas Merton and the Saints of Carmel"<sup>1</sup> is a carefully researched examination of how his acquaintance with the Carmelite saints is directly related to his search for God. She examines, in particular, the influence of John of the Cross, Therese of Lisieux, and Theresa of Avila on his early work. This essay is especially valuable for delineating the "first period" of his writings on the Carmelite saints (1938 to his ordination, 1949), and the "second period" beginning in the 1950s until the early sixties. Paguio builds this study into a compelling case for Merton's evolution as both a writer and devotee of the Carmelite spirituality. A case in point is the "Little Way" of St. Therese, whose absolute "trust and surrender" finds an imprint on the Trappistine, Mother Berchmans, whom Merton celebrated by writing her biography, *Exile Ends in Glory*.

Paguio's most important contribution comes by way of her interpretations of Merton's poetry vis-à-vis the Carmelite saints. She offers a poignant reading of "Elias-Variations on a Theme" with its celebration of the contemplative's "listening" emblematic of a deep

1. *Spiritual Life* 42 (Summer 1996) 74-86.



relationship with God. This poem comes from the collection *The Strange Islands*, a poorly received volume that is redeemed, in part, by her exegesis of *The Spiritual Canticle* of St. John of the Cross, the source of Merton's title. In conjunction with this contextual appreciation of St. John of the Cross, this essay includes the author's response to a meditative study on the thirty-five drawings of the Carmelite saint which Merton completed between 1946–1953. Here is a genuinely creative turn in Merton scholarship, employing non-verbal elements of the Merton archives.

*Cistercian Studies Quarterly* regularly includes essays about Thomas Merton. This year three authors addressed very different topics. Paul Ruttle, CP contributed "Voice of the Stranger: Merton's Penetration of the Mystery of the Maya."<sup>2</sup> This essay examines various texts in which Merton considered the pre-Columbian, Conquest, and modern Maya; Ruttle goes on to report upon the remarkable progress made in the study of the Maya civilization during the past five years (notably the studies of Linda Schele and David Stuart). While Merton may have worked with inaccurate data or may not have had access to the translations of eighty percent of the writings now available through the work of cultural anthropologists, Ruttle credits Merton with a greater achievement: "[He] was somehow able to grasp intuitively the vitality of the art and spirituality of this ancient people" (206). This study identifies how Merton's contemplative identity gravitated to the reality of faith of the Maya. A careful analysis of his essay from *Ishi Means Man*, "The Cross Fighters: Notes on a Race War," interprets the deep religious currents in this culture as it struggled with interracial warfare and the persecution of the Maya by Ladinos. Ruttle alertly relates this analysis to the three versions of Merton's autobiographical essay, *Day of A Stranger*. A comparison of the texts is remarkable because, as Ruttle notes, Merton removed the earlier direct references to the Maya in the third and published version of the notes, "but [he] has included them spiritually and symbolically in his mention of the *axis mundi*." When coupled with Merton's attention to the Maya in *The Geography of Lograire's* sections IX, X, and XI where Merton again addresses the Maya culture with allusions to the metaphor of "the center" and the phenomenon of the "Miraculous Talking Cross," the mature hermit's creative reworking of the global reality of violence brims with reclaimed meaning for readers. Ruttle rounds out

2. *Cistercian Studies Quarterly* 31:2 (1996).

this excellent piece of scholarship with a chronicle of more recent political events in the jungles around Chiapas, Mexico. The effects of the North American Free Trade Act (NAFTA) and the influx of eighty thousand Maya immigrants from Guatemala have only borne out Merton's passion for peace in this sacred land.

"The Paschal Heart of Merton's Spirituality"<sup>3</sup> by Patrick F. O'Connell originates in response to the *Horizons* journal's 1994 review symposium on *Ace of Freedoms: Thomas Merton's Christ*. He asks whether it is possible to "move the debate" beyond the terms raised in the symposium. In that context, Christine Bochen argued that Merton is better described as "theocentric" rather than "Christocentric." As the author of *Ace of Freedoms*, I had responded in the *Horizons* forum to the way in which I see a theocentric lens distorts Merton's contribution. I do find it disingenuous for O'Connell to quote from his own essay in *The Merton Annual* 7 (1994) studying Merton's eight freedom songs, but to disregard the other review symposium on *Ace of Freedoms* in that very volume—a twenty-nine page discussion by Patrick Eastman, Diana Culbertson, O.P. and two distinguished christologists, Donald J. Goergen, O.P., and Jean-Marc Laporte, S.J.

Suffice it for me to offer two observations about O'Connell's feeble effort which never really arrives at a conclusion and certainly contributes nothing by way of a resolution to the "debate." First, readers ought to be suspicious that the overwhelming majority of Merton texts he quotes are early writings; there is a wealth of Merton material (as I demonstrate in *Ace of Freedoms*) in the last five to eight years of his life which reflects an extraordinary development of his kenotic christology, especially in his Camus and Faulkner essays as well as in his social criticism. Second, O'Connell's theological categories are not carefully delineated. To speak of the paschal mystery in Christian theology is to speak of the death and resurrection of *Jesus Christ*, and therefore it must be seen within the broader context of christology. The work of contemporary christologists has sought to reintegrate soteriology with christology. O'Connell apparently is unfamiliar with the groundbreaking research of christologist William M. Thompson, "Exploring the Christ-Experience IV: Thomas Merton's Transcultural Christ," *Jesus, Lord and Savior: A Therapeutic Christology and Soteriology* (Paulist, 1980). Since the genius of Christian theology is the mystery of the Trinity, I would suggest that O'Connell also examine the work of

3. *Cistercian Studies Quarterly* 31:3 (1996).

Catherine LaCugna and scholars who are building on her revisionist study, *God For Us: The Trinity and Christian Life* (HarperSanFrancisco, 1991). A purely theocentric approach cannot do justice to Thomas Merton's spirituality, or to any "Christian" spirituality. While O'Connell makes passing reference to the Trinity at a few junctures of his essay, he fails to grasp fully the methodological principle upon which LaCugna (and, I think, Merton) builds: "Christian theology must always speak about God on the basis of God's self-communication in Christ and in the Spirit." This effort is not one of his more careful or constructive contributions.

The third and final *Cistercian Studies Quarterly* essay for 1996 is Craig Helms' "Mary as the New Eve in Thomas Merton's Poetry."<sup>4</sup> It is encouraging to see more attention paid to Merton's religious poetry. Helms exegetes a broad collection of poems (dating from the early 1940s to the early 1960s) in terms of Merton's bringing "fresh, passionate, vibrant images and language" to both patristic and biblical Mariology. Helms thematically structures the analysis of poems around Mary's "humility, obedience, co-redemptive atonement, queenship, and role in humanization, as she reverses Eve's fault." This essay demonstrates fine historical research in patristic sources. The influences of Bernard of Clairvaux and other Cistercian spirituality combine with the gospels and psalms to create the ethos from which Merton wrote these poems. Helms examines each of the themes he has identified by interpreting particular poems: "The Evening of the Visitation," "Advent," "The Blessed Virgin Mary Compared to a Window," "The Annunciation," "Aubade—The Annunciation," "The Quickening of St. John the Baptist," "Hagia Sophia," "Canticle for the Blessed Virgin," "An Argument: On the Passion of Christ," "La Salette," "The Trappist Cemetery—Gethsemani," and "The Fall of Night." The essay is not only a valuable tool for readers unfamiliar with the Catholic traditions of Mariology and contemplation, but it also raises the issue of art's relationship to spirituality. If there is one issue in this tradition that deserves to be critiqued, however, it would be the references to Mary's role as "co-redemptrix." The Second Vatican Council carefully clarified some lingering distortions about this issue, distortions which even creep into Merton's early poems. Helms provides a valuable, insightful analysis. While it is alert to both the metaphors and imagery which Merton's imagination renders, one

4. *Cistercian Studies Quarterly* 31:4 (1996).

leaves this essay with a sense that Helms might have ventured more by way of an appraisal of the poetry *qua* poetry and not only as artifact touched by doctrine.

Annice Callahan, R.S.C.J., makes a genuine contribution to Merton scholarship with her nuanced and carefully researched essay, "The Development of Thomas Merton's Christ-Consciousness."<sup>5</sup> It adds to her earlier work, *Spiritual Guides for Today* (Crossroad, 1992), which included Merton as one of six contemporaries who have lived what she there calls "certain attitudes of heart with which we can identify."

Callahan traces the dramatic shift in Merton's spirituality: from the personalistic and individualized eucharistic spirituality of early works like *The Sign of Jonas* and *The Living Bread*; to the final decade of his life when "he let go of an exclusive mystical body language and branched out to dialogue with unbelievers, calling himself 'a diaspora Christian'. . . ." Her essay offers a reflective synthesis of the currents in Merton's "Christ-consciousness" ranging from his early years through his more mature openness to compassionate solidarity. She alertly insists that Merton's solitude and identity as a solitary is not to be mistaken for the stance of an individualist, but that "he was keenly aware that solitude opens us to the world's needs."

By calling attention to *New Seeds of Contemplation* and describing its newly revised chapter, "A Body of Broken Bones," "his most original chapter," Callahan carefully traces the mystery of Christ's redemptive love in our suffering solidarity. In this regard, her analysis of Merton's expansive political horizon in *Seeds of Destruction* combines with her interpretation of his changed sense of "spiritual freedom" in *Conjectures of a Guilty Bystander*. Finally, Callahan addresses Merton's growing awareness of the "transcultural" Christ without muting "Christ as the uncompromising truth of who God is, of who each person really is, and of what the world is meant to be." This is an essay worthy of any reader who is serious about understanding Thomas Merton. In Callahan's words, "By the end of his life, Merton developed not only a consciousness of Christ's presence in the world but also a consciousness of Christ's concerns and compassion for the world."

In May 1996 The Thomas Merton Society of Great Britain and Ireland convened a conference at La Sainte Union College, Southampton, England. Papers from that conference have now been

5. *The American Benedictine Review* 47:1 (March 1996) 99-113.

collected in *Your Heart Is My Hermitage*,<sup>6</sup> edited by Danny Sullivan and Ian Thomson. In addition to the three main conference addresses and a roundtable by Merton's friends, the volume collects papers presented at topics sessions devoted to "Thomas Merton and Other Traditions," "Thomas Merton on Solitude and Community," "Thomas Merton—The Early Years," and "Thomas Merton and the Human Community." While readers can profit from many of the dozen special interests reflected in those papers, as well as from the homily offered by Jim Forest at the Sunday Eucharist to conclude the conference, I call readers' attention to two particular presentations.

Canon A. M. [Donald] Allchin, President of the Society and a friend of Merton's, presented "Celebrating Thomas Merton" at the conference banquet. In his inimitable, sprightly manner, Allchin enthusiastically engaged the question of celebrating Merton as one of the "saints." He brought to this task his own knowledge of the Eastern Orthodox Church's distinct effort to "recognize" saints under the direction of the Holy Spirit: "It is through the spontaneous action of the people of God, recognizing and celebrating God's gift to his world, in and through this particular person, that the public, official recognition of the saint, can in time take place." He contrasts this with the Western (Roman) Church's more juridical and canonical procedures for "making saints." Allchin then addresses Merton's role in seeing God's presence in all the religious traditions of humanity, what Merton identified as his exploratory task. It is telling that Allchin concludes his paean to Merton's Christian faith with a quotation from the Czeslaw Milosz correspondence (he calls it "one of the most challenging but I believe one of the most important of all Merton's correspondences") that celebrates invincible "silence and the cross of which we know" and the victory of Christ's resurrection.

Robert E. Daggy has added to his special interest in Merton's childhood and his relationship with his father, Owen Merton. Although illness prevented Daggy from traveling to England for the Southampton conference, his paper "Question and Revelation: Thomas Merton's Recovery of the Ground of Birth," which I had the privilege of reading for him, his presence and the impact of this paper were inestimable there. In some ways this essay overlaps with Daggy's earlier

6. *Your Heart Is My Hermitage: Thomas Merton's Vision of Solitude and Community*, ed. Danny Sullivan and Ian Thomson (London: The Thomas Merton Society of Great Britain and Ireland, 1966).

essay, "Birthday Theology: A Reflection on Thomas Merton and the Bermuda Menage" which appeared in *The Kentucky Review* VII (1987). However, Daggy is developing further what he describes as Merton's interest in his own "unfinished childhood business." The legacy of Owen-the-artist, Owen-the-religious seer, and the sense of a "vocation" figured prominently in his son's search for identity.

What is most intriguing in this essay is the careful manner in which Daggy analyzes Merton's suffering in terms of a longing for his lost father (Owen died of a brain tumor just before his son's sixteenth birthday). The complex of questions posed about the unfinished "pain" vis-à-vis Thomas Merton's father revolves around the question, "Was the overblown view of Owen in his public pronouncements at variance with what he felt within himself?" Daggy presents a textured, multi-layered account which is well anticipated in his own introductory response: "The answer would seem to be both 'yes' and 'no.'" Daggy's essay will familiarize many readers with new biographical details. For one, Thomas Merton was indeed in rebellion against the idea of his recently widowed father's affair and prospects of marriage with novelist Evelyn Scott during 1922–1923 in Bermuda. This essay ends on a lyric note as it interprets Merton's August 1967 "A Letter on the Contemplative Life" in light of the monk's ongoing search for his father. All Merton readers will benefit immensely from this poignant, meticulously researched contribution.

The year does not pass without at least one significant essay on Merton and interreligious dialogue. Terry Graham's "Sufism: The Strange Subject; Thomas Merton's Views on Sufism"<sup>7</sup> offers a semi-popular article on the monk's interest in Islam and this mystical tradition. Triggered by correspondence with Islamic scholar, the Frenchman Louis Massignon, and Boston University's Herbert Mason, Merton's interest in Sufism grew in the final decade of his life. Correspondence with Iranian psychologist Reza Arasteh bridged Merton's interest through Arasteh's exploration of the relationship between Islam's mystics and the psychological work of both Jung and Fromm. Graham, however, points to the exchange of letters between Merton and the Pakistani scholar, Abdul Aziz as the "fertile source" for Merton's 1967–1968 series of Sunday lectures to novices at the Abbey of Gethsemani.

7. *Sufi* 30 (Summer 1996) 31–40.

What proves most valuable in Graham's article is his attention to two encounters "which fired what one might call the 'Sufi nature' of Thomas Merton, one on the classically spiritual plane, the other on the *eros* plane. The first was the visit of the Algerian Sufi shaikh, Sidi Abdesalam; the second, the passionate love affair with the student nurse, Margie Smith" (36). The interpretation of these events lends insight into Merton's eventual travel to Asia and his "heart-opening necessary to receive Divine or True Love" (37). Graham includes a brief synopsis and excerpts from the series of six talks which Merton gave in 1967–1968. The article is highly recommended for readers either unfamiliar with Sufism and Merton's interest, or those who heretofore have been perplexed when tackling more technical explanations.

The Elizabeth F. Cheney Foundation sponsored a loan exhibition, "Negotiating Rapture: The Power of Art to Transform Lives,"<sup>8</sup> at the new Museum of Contemporary Art in Chicago from June 21–October 20, 1996. Merton's Columbia University classmate, the abstract painter Ad Reinhardt was featured in the exhibition, which includes a copy of the "Small Painting for T.M." which he gave the monk in 1957; the painting hung in Merton's cell and then in the hermitage. Five of Merton's photographs were included in "Negotiating the Rapture" and reproduced (along with Reinhardt's paintings) in the exhibit's catalogue (88–91) by the same title. Martin E. Marty of the University of Chicago has written the accompanying text (78–79, 88–89, 91) for both artists' works, describing the monk's photographs as having "something of the aesthetic of Abstract Expressionism" and echoes of Samuel Palmer and William Blake. Marty addresses cogently Merton's interest in the mysticism of the West and of the East. Perhaps one of the most revealing phrases he quotes from Merton is his search for "undiluted reality" in his art. Readers who have access to this handsome volume can savor this brief but refined focus on Merton the artist.

Finally, a new research tool appeared in 1996 which should make future reading and research with Thomas Merton's correspondence an easier task and a more integral experience. *Index to the Published Letters of Thomas Merton* compiled by Patricia A. Burton is available from The Thomas Merton Society of Rochester (4095 East Avenue, Rochester, N.Y. 14618-3798). The five volumes of selected let-

8. *Negotiating the Rapture: The Power of Art to Transform Lives* (Chicago: Museum of Contemporary Art, 1996).

ters which have been published by Farrar Straus Giroux are: *The Hidden Ground of Love* (1985); *The Road to Joy* (1989); *The School of Charity* (1990); *The Courage for Truth* (1993); and *Witness to Freedom* (1994). They address, respectively: religious experience and social concerns; new and old friends; religious renewal and spiritual direction; writers; and times of crisis.

William H. Shannon, the general editor of the project, writes a Preface and quotes John Henry Newman's maxim that "The true life of a person is in his [her] letters" and insists "that one of the ways we will come to know this unusual monk, who keeps eluding our grasp, is a careful study of his letters." For this very reason, Burton's index is valuable because it makes possible a chronological reading of Merton's letters rather than accessing letters according to the content and various arrangements of the different volumes. Moreover, she has arranged the index by both alphabetical listing of individuals who received letters (noting the date of the first letter and the total number of letters) and by volume-by-volume detailed list by name; and also with a lengthy listing of letters sorted by date. Parallel columns provide the requisite information to locate the letters.

From these 2,227 letters and from this carefully constructed index compiled by Patricia Burton we can expect much important critical analysis of the life and thought of Thomas Merton to be written. We can also hope that a trade edition of this unique tool will follow the 8 1/2 by 11 inch offprint version in which it has made its debut. It is certainly a worthy and welcome—indeed a necessary—addition to the shelf of any serious Merton scholar.