Thomas Merton and George Grant: Hawk's Dream, Owl's Insight

Ron Dart

> When the history of twentieth-century monasticism comes to be written, it is hard not to think that two monks will dominate the story: Thomas Merton and Jean Leclercq.
>
> Bernard McGinn[1]

> Altogether, his (Grant's) contributions to the CBC probably exceeded those of any other Canadian thinker of his generation, except perhaps Northrop Frye.
>
> David Cayley[2]

Thomas Merton (1915-1968) and George Grant (1918-1988) were contemporaries. Merton was American and Grant was Canadian, and both grappled with many of the same issues, yet they did not know one another. Merton was a well known public person in his day, and since his death, his books (and many commentaries on them) have grown and flourished. Grant was an equally important public intellectual in his day, and since his death, his books (and a multitude of commentaries on them) have produced a rich and bountiful harvest. The fact that Merton and Grant had many of the same concerns, and the fact that Merton and Grant did not know one another (and the scholarly world of both do not interact) may mean that a more substantive article and book on these men does need to be written. This short essay, in some small way, will attempt to build a needful and necessary bridge between Merton and Grant, and, in doing so, bring together not only Merton and Grant's perspectives, but also the American and Canadian.

It may be most valuable to touch on the four following areas of convergence and overlap between Merton and Grant: 1) the contemplative way of knowing; 2) contemplation and interfaith dialogue; 3) contemplation and the church; and 4) contemplation and prophetic politics. Merton and Grant thought and lived out these issues in a compelling and challenging way. There were differences in the way they handled and dealt with such concerns (and these should not be denied or ignored), but the fact that they,

in their wide-ranging and interdisciplinary ways, dared to deal with these areas, speaks much about a way of understanding and interpreting Christian faith that has much to commend it.

Merton was drawn to Robinson Jeffers and Jeffers 'Hawk's Dream'. This poem did much to orient Merton. Grant was drawn to the owl, and the film on his life, *The Owl and the Dynamo*, tells the tale of why Grant turned to the metaphor of the owl for guidance. Merton and Grant were both drawn to artistic and literary traditions as a way of seeing and knowing, and these two metaphors, the dream of the hawk and the insight of the owl can speak much to us as mutually interdependent cultures of seeing.

Contemplation and Theology: Merton and the Contemplative Way

Merton and Grant were quite aware how theology, philosophy and Biblical exegesis could be taken captive by a form of scientific empiricism and, in the process, human subjectivity on our all too human journey could be marginalized. Merton and Grant were not opposed to theology or philosophy; however they did think such disciplines had to go deep, be transformative, and reach personal levels. In their different ways, both sought to return to the Classical and Patristic tradition of mystical/spiritual/contemplative theology as a way of recovering and reclaiming the depths of the Christian faith. Merton turned initially, of course, to the Cistercian tradition at Gethsemani that was, in theory, supposed to be about a contemplative way of knowing and being, but he sometimes found the place was so busy and active that much of the old tradition seemed to have been jettisoned.

Grant taught philosophy and theology all of his academic life at Dalhousie and McMaster Universities, but the contemplative way of knowing in the academy had been replaced and supplanted by a scientific way of knowing in which the thing studied was objectified; this, it was argued, would offer us objective knowledge. Merton and Grant spoke and wrote about this one dimensional and single vision way of knowing, and their turn to the contemplative was, in many ways, counter cultural—a rebellion against the dominant ways of knowing and living the faith journey.

This shift, in the modern world, from the 'vita contemplativa' to the 'vita activa' as a way of knowing and being was duly noted by Hannah Arendt in her classic work in political theory, *The Human Condition* (1958). Arendt's chapter, in *The Human Condition*,

'The Reversal of Contemplation and Action', reflected upon the loss that had occurred with such a reversal. It is significant to note that *The Human Condition* was published at a period of time when Merton and Grant were thinking many of the same thoughts, and Merton commented on this important book in his journal, and most importantly he noted the loss in modern times of the Greek *polis*. The Classical Tradition, for the most part, elevated and prized the contemplative way over and against the active, but, in the modern world, the 'vita activa' has subordinated (and, often banished) the 'vita contemplativa'. Both Merton and Grant attempted, in their different ways, to reverse this. Both men called for a return to the contemplative as the ground, roots, core and center from which the active way could and would authentically emerge and take shape and form in the public realm, place and space. This turn to the contemplative opposed both the hegemony of a thoughtless activism and the dominance of a narrow empirical way of knowing and being. Both Merton and Grant sought to widen the means by which we know, and deepen the source from which we live.

Thomas Merton turned to the monastic way as a means of finding, clarifying and recovering his true self. The monastic way, in principle, was about an openness to be found and transformed by the draw and overtures of God's welcoming grace and goodness. It was in the resulting stillness, waiting, *quies* that the meaning of true theology could and would be known. The contemplative way is about living out the longing for God and making sense of what such a longing means on our human journey.

In 1949, Merton's *Seeds of Contemplation* was published. This text explores, examines and ponders how the soil of the soul can be properly prepared to receive the seeds of the Divine. Merton makes it quite clear, in his inviting and frequently poetic way, that human agency is essential to the contemplative quest. He probes the depths of the contemplative way and its connection to the inner life.

Throughout most of the 1950s, Merton continued to unpack and unravel the meaning of the contemplative way in a variety of books mining the Christian tradition. *Bread in the Wilderness* (1953) addresses Merton's theology of the Cross, and the significance of the crucified Christ for the contemplative journey. The sustained and evocative meditation on the 'Devot Christ' takes us into the depths of Christ's suffering and its significance for us: the bread of the Cross can provide sustained nourishment through the wilderness of time. Merton

made it clear that he refused to separate his commitment to contemplative theology from an ever deepening understanding of the Cross. The Bread of Christ is very much, for Merton, the living bread and that which communally feeds and nourishes the soul in the wilderness and desert of time. *The Living Bread* (1956) is a companion piece to *Bread in the Wilderness*. Both books hold high the significance of the Cross, the living bread of the Mass, liturgy as public event of transformation and the essential role of the Psalter in understanding transformation.

In 1962, *New Seeds of Contemplation* appeared. This book builds on the 1949 text *Seeds of Contemplation*, and continues to probe the differences between the false and true self. Merton was dying to ego and opening to the transformed life. The complex and nuanced nature of knowing the difference between the new and old self was front and center for Merton. *New Seeds of Contemplation* clarifies for the attentive reader the nature of the transformative journey. Quite clearly, there is a center and core of Merton's understanding of the contemplative way: it is about becoming a new person. Merton sought to know the difference between the conventional, fiction and false self and the authentic, real and eternal self. The Cross was most instructive in decoding this dilemma; hence Merton's contemplative theology remained focused on the Cross of Christ.

Merton longed to go to the very source and depths of transformation, for he knew, if this journey was not taken, the false and illusory self could and would create a hall of mirrors. Merton was committed to such a death-resurrection quest, and the contemplative way opened for him the doors into how such transition could occur, and the role of God and human agency in this process. Both the West and East, at their contemplative best, saw the ego as something that was a mirage and fiction, a distraction and false face, as something to be free from. Both traditions agreed that to be truly free a letting go had to occur; a dying and leaving behind had to be done. Merton, therefore, as a contemplative theologian, stood against a way of doing theology that was dogmatic and propositional, but lacked serious teaching on the relationship between spirituality and theology. Merton was a contemplative theologian, and this meant he was always in the process of bridging the gap between the Human and the Divine, between human aspiration and longing and Divine grace and welcoming presence.

II. Contemplation and Theology: Grant and the Contemplative Way

Grant taught philosophy at Dalhousie University in Halifax from 1947-1959, McMaster University from 1961-1980, and he returned to Halifax in 1980 and lived there until his death in 1988. George Grant, like Thomas Merton, sought to retrieve and rediscover the contemplative way as a path of knowing and being. Grant was not a monk, but like Merton, sought to make sense of the contemplative way for the broader public. When George and Shiela Grant became Anglicans in 1956, the contemplative way of High Church Anglicanism at King's College (Halifax) was very much the air they breathed even though Grant had written about the contemplative way before becoming an Anglican. Grant's article, 'Contemplation in an Expanding Economy' in *The Anglican Outlook* (1955) did challenge both the Anglican Church of Canada and her theologians to ponder the fate and future of the church if a certain path was followed and not questioned.

Grant created a storm in the Canadian academic world in 1951 with his article, 'Philosophy', in which he argued that modern and academic philosophy had lost its contemplative dimension, and, as such, had become a lapdog and lackey of a one dimensional way of knowing and being. Modern philosophy had become so subservient to a narrow scientific methodology that human longing had been banished; tinkering with the meaning of language was all that was left for the academy. The commitment by many modern professional philosophers to logical positivism and linguistic analysis was, for Grant, the death knell of philosophy. Grant, in 'Philosophy', called the guild and clan back to the contemplative heritage of philosophy, back to the place of human longing for meaning and purpose, back to the place of inner attention and transformation, back to Plato (and, for Grant, Plato's finest modern interpreter, Simone Weil). Grant was also drawn to existentialism as a more human and humane way than logical positivism to deal with the human condition. Grant's lectures for the CBC, in 1955, on Jean-Paul Sartre and, in 1959, on Fyodor Dostoevsky made it quite clear where and why Grant stood on the contemplative and existential path rather than the more narrow and limited empirical and analytic tradition. It is important to note that Grant was, throughout much of his life, drawn to Heidegger and Heidegger's more receptive and contemplative way of knowing

even though, by day's end, Grant did not agree with most of the content and conclusions of Heidegger. Grant was, in his last few years, working on a book on Heidegger and Christianity.

Grant, unlike Merton, taught at public universities, but both walked the extra mile, prophet like, to call both theology and philosophy back to their contemplative roots, to deeper and older sources of knowing God and being transformed by the mystery of God's purifying love. Both Merton and Grant, in their contemplative theology and philosophy, held high the "via negativa" or the apophatic way: both were critical of a form of western rationalism that either sought to master or banish the inscrutable mystery of God. Both realized the deeper contemplative journey was about many deaths, much letting go, many resurrections into the mystery of God's gracious and complete Love. This meant that both men had a certain affinity for the Orthodox distinction between God's 'essence-energies', and the way of a tradition that recognized a holy ground of mystery where none dare speak. Grant wrote much, in his academic career, about the dangers of the way the academy had lost its way, the way wisdom had been trumped by knowledge, *paideia* by *techne*, teaching by research.

Grant, like Merton, connected the contemplative way to the cross of suffering. Martin Luther had made much, in his day, of the theology of glory and the theology of the cross. The theology of glory had a tendency to ignore the suffering of Christ (and our redemption), elevate the resurrection and be insensitive to inexplicable suffering. The triumphalism that often walks hand in hand with a theology of glory was offensive to Grant for a variety of theological, philosophical and political reasons. Grant tended to emphasize Luther's theology of the cross as a corrective to an excessive interest in the theology of glory. Christ, on the cross, plumbed the depths of God's suffering love and the extent to which God would go to illuminate and draw the human race back to unity with Himself. This God was willing to die, to empty all the grandeur and fullness of the Divine in order to serve and suffer, to fail and fall, so new life could be offered. This was not the way of power, of strength, of military might, of mastery and control. The cross both clarified the deeper nature and meaning of goodness, and opened a surer way to understand the meaning of transformation. Shiela Grant's article, 'George Grant and the Theology of the Cross', in *George Grant and the Subversion of Modernity* (1996), and the recent, *George Grant and the Theology of the Cross: The Chris-*

tian Foundations of His Thought (2001), by Harris Athanasiadas, speak clearly to Grant's concerns about the differences between the theology of glory and the theology of the cross, and their implications.

Grant, as indicated, created a storm in the academic world in 1951 with his article, 'Philosophy', and, by 1960, he resigned from York University because the Philosophy Department had so bowed the knee to the empirical way that both Plato and Christianity were banished from the hallowed halls. Grant became a hero to many in the Canadian counter culture of the 1960s because of his willingness to critique the drift and direction of major public universities, and his willingness to resign from York when conscience clashed with expediency.

The recent publication of *Survival or Prophecy? The Letters of Thomas Merton and Jean Leclercq* (2002) delineates Merton and Leclercq's desire to call the monastic traditions back to their contemplative roots. Merton saw such a way as the means of survival for the monastic orders. Both Merton and Grant, in their struggles, spoke to a wide and large audience, and they spoke in such a way that they touched and tapped into the depths of the human condition and human longing. Both Merton and Grant were keenly aware of the fact that there had been a reversal of the contemplative-active dimensions in the West. Both men sought to retrieve, recover and elevate the Classical contemplative way of knowing in opposition to the dominance of the activist and empirical way. Both saw in the contemplative dimensions of the Occident and Orient a way of doing philosophy and theology that the modern West was in danger of losing and forgetting. Both men held to a theology of the cross which grounded the contemplative way.

III. The Contemplative Way: East and West: Merton and Grant

The contemplative turn by both Merton and Grant led them to dialogue between the East and the West. Both men sought the contemplative in the West and East for insight and inspiration. The West had become frenetic and co-opted by *techne* and a technological society, and been taken in by the demands of empirical science as the way of knowing. The soul and the spirit, the inner life of the mind and imagination had become parched, barren and lean in the process. Both Merton and Grant felt this keenly, and they sought for another way to traverse and find the depths of the real and authentic self in a society that had given itself to many illusions and masks of the self.

Merton was interested in the East as early as 1938 when he attended Columbia. It was there he met the Hindu monk, Bramachari, who urged Merton to explore the western contemplative tradition. Merton's deeper journey into the Eastern contemplative way was prompted by two things: the need to discern a way to truly be contemplative, and, in a more important sense, the task of discerning and distinguishing the false from the true self; the ego from the authentic self. Merton found, in the East, insight and wisdom in these areas.

The flowering of Merton's interest and dialogue with the East was at its most intense and mature in the 1960s. The publication of *Gandhi on Non-Violence* (1964), *The Way of Chuang Tzu* (1965), *Mystics and Zen Masters* (1967), *Zen and the Birds of Appetite* (1968) and *The Asian Journal of Thomas Merton* (1973) all make clear that the West must engage the East at a contemplative level, and that the East has much to teach the West about exposing the pretensions of the ego and seeking deep transformation. Merton had met Dr. D.T. Suzuki in 1964, and his correspondence on the relationship between Zen and the Christian contemplative tradition very much spoke to the issues of death, a letting go and a leaving behind of the ego, the old Adam. Merton's death in 1968 at Bangkok, Thailand seems symbolic, and the fact he met the Dalai Lama and Thich Nhat Hanh (who he called 'my brother') before his death also speaks of his affinity with Eastern thought and its leaders. There is a natural unfolding of contemplative thought from *New Seeds of Contemplation* (1961) to interest in the East, and it was the contemplative way of knowing that brought these two traditions together.

Merton's interest in the contemplative aspects of the East placed him very much in the forefront of those (in the past and present) who turned to the East for insight, illumination and enlightenment. Emerson, Thoreau and Whitman before Merton, and many important American Beats (such as Snyder, Ginsberg, Whalen and Kerouac) had turned to the East as a means of countering a West that had lost its contemplative ways. Merton, unlike the American Transcendentalists and the Beats, grounded his contemplative journey in the Roman Catholic way; this makes Merton unique within the American context of the 1960s. Did Merton's turn to the East, though, mean that he saw a unity and convergence at the heart and core of the contemplative traditions of the East and West? Merton, unlike the American Transcendentalists and American Beats, remained both a Roman Catholic and Cistercian monk until

his end. It can be argued that Merton turned to the East for aid and insight on what to be free from (the ego), but when asked what he was to be free for (the new self united in Christ and the Church), he was most Christian. *Ace of Freedoms: Thomas Merton's Christ* (1993) by George Kilcourse makes this position quite clear. Merton had, like the Patristic Fathers in the Latin West and Greek East, a generous natural theology, but, as a Christian contemplative theologian, as Merton was, the Grace of Christ did fulfill the longings and desires of other natural religions, just as Christian theology crowned philosophy.

Grant's interest in other religions, like Merton's, was not just for the purpose of information, facts and exotica. He spoke much against the 'museum culture' of the academy, and the tendency of such places to cut out the heart and life of the great and grand contemplative traditions of the religions of the world. Just as Merton was both a teacher to novices and scholastics in the 1950s and 1960s, George Grant taught a generation of students at McMaster how to do theology in a contemplative way. McMaster had one of the largest graduate programs in North America in the 1960s-1970s in the area of Western-Eastern religions, and it was Grant, as chair of the department that had built up the program. Grant did not write as much as Merton on contemplative and interfaith dialogue, but he did address it. *The George Grant Reader* (1998) contains a foreword to Bithika Mukerji's *Neo-Vedanta and Modernity* (1983). Grant praised Mukerji's book, and in his foreword, he highlighted how the modern world had made it difficult to understand the Neo-Vedantic way of joy/bliss. Grant suggested that the modern world had no sense of ontology, no sense of the proper end (or *telos)* from which joy/bliss might be understood. The driven and dynamic world of North America, that is so indebted to those like Locke and Hume, Rousseau and Darwin, has no sense of a deeper way of knowing, hence the contemplative insights of the Neo-Vedanta are outside the pale of many in the political and theological West. Grant argued, in the foreword, that a hearing and heeding of the Indian Neo-Vedanta could teach the West much.

Grant, like Merton, attempted to draw his audience back to the contemplative way and the role the East could play in teaching the West about such a way. Grant sought to hold the University to an older tradition, a tradition closer to the monastic and

contemplative way, but, in the age of the dynamo, science and the technological society (and the role of the University in serving such ends); Grant was often ignored and marginalized.

Indian religion taught Grant much, and his attempt to understand the depths of the Christian contemplative tradition was informed by the Gospels and Plato (as interpreted by Simone Weil and Iris Murdoch) and the best of the Indian heritage. Just as Merton's generous natural theology offered him a way to heed the best of the East, so Grant's gracious natural theology opened the doors into the East for him, also. Grant had a real affinity for the contemplative tradition of Hinduism just as Merton was quite drawn to the contemplative traditions of Buddhism (Zen, Tibetan, Vietnamese) and other mystical traditions such as Islamic Sufism and the Jewish Hasidic and Kabalistic traditions. Both men saw in the East (and contemplative traditions) antidotes for the toxins in the West, but both men realized there were immense (although forgotten) resources in the West that they could yet draw from.

IV. Prophets to the Church: Have You Worn the Robes?

The publication of *Thomas Merton's American Prophecy* (1998) and *Survival and Prophecy: The Letters of Thomas Merton and Jean Leclercq* (2002) in the last few years has highlighted the obvious fact that Merton stood very much in the Jewish-Christian prophetic tradition. George Grant stood within the same line and lineage. Merton spoke from within the American context and beyond while Grant did so from within the Canadian context. There are those who have suggested and argued that Merton, in the autumn of 1968, was traveling away from the constraints of the Roman Catholic church.

Merton's graphic and never to be forgotten religious experience at Polonnaruwa so well described in *The Asian Journal*, his visits with the Dalai Lama and his friendship with Thich Nhat Hanh seem to tell the tale of a man on the way to another place. Some have suggested Merton was on his way to Buddhism. But, there is another way to read Merton. If, as I have suggested above, Merton had a generous and truly catholic natural theology, he would have had a sincere interest in the wisdom and insights of other traditions.

Merton was very much a prophet, and this means he was steeped in his own tradition, and that he sought to speak such a tradition in the language of his time. Merton's way, as a prophet,

was to find the language of the time, employ such interests and language, and then lead his audience into the fullness of the Christian way.

Merton spoke to the church on a variety of levels, and at each level, he was both welcomed and opposed. Merton was a key figure in the renewal of the monastic way. Merton's commitment to the Cistercian tradition, his interest in the Benedictine, Carthusian and Carmelite ways speak much about his desire to find the centre, core and inner integrity of the contemplative way of the monastic tradition. The correspondence between Merton/Leclercq in *Survival or Prophecy?* explain Merton's crucial role in the renewal of the monastic way within the Roman Catholic tradition. But, Merton's prophetic life and voice went deeper and further than the monastery. Merton spoke, by going deeper into the real message and meaning of the monastic way, to the depths of the human condition and the very purpose of the church. Merton saw the purpose of the church as being profoundly ecumenical, concerned with interfaith contemplative dialogue and engaged (in a non-ideological way) with public and political issues. Merton summed his truly grounded ecumenical vision up in *Conjectures of a Guilty Bystander*:

> If I can unite in myself the thought and devotion of Eastern and Western Christendom, the Greek and Latin Fathers, the Russians and Spanish mystics, I can prepare in myself the reunion of divided Christendom....We must contain all the divided world in ourselves and transcend them in Christ.[3]

A full vision such as this did make certain demands on the church, but it was such a truly catholic approach that was prophetic.

In this, Merton was prophet, although he was often unaccepted in his own tradition (particularly in the pre-Vatican II era). Merton called monks, the church and the world to a deeper contemplative vision of unity, a vision in which the masks, ego and phantoms of the inner life could be exposed and dealt a death blow, and the real and authentic self would be revealed and appear. The new self, hidden in Christ, would speak with a certain consistent ethical vision to the church. Merton had many concerns about the rather right wing leanings of the Roman Catholic church of his time. He duly noted their legitimate concerns for the family, traditional gender roles, their worries and frets about abortion, eutha-

nasia and contraception. But, he spoke out strongly about the Roman Catholic position and silence about the Vietnam war, the American empire, the nuclear policy of the USA, the environmental questions raised by Rachael Carson and the rape of the earth by corporations. The 'Christian realism' of Reinhold Niebuhr disturbed Merton and the 'just war' theory, he feared, could be used to rationalize injustice. Many of Merton's concerns seemed to link him with the 'New Left' of the 1960s, and his willingness to identify himself with Dorothy Day, the Catholic Worker and Dan/Phil Berrigan emphasized that. This did not bode well for him amongst the liberal establishment. When Merton published 'Letter to a White liberal' in 1961, the doyens of the liberal Sanhedrin were displeased.

George Grant was a prophet to the church and the world who shared many of Merton's concerns. Grant was loyal, as was Merton, to the church, and, like Merton, Grant was a vigorous and rigorous critic of the church. Those who only knew how to criticize the many failings and inconsistencies of the church were met with this question by Grant: Have you worn the robes? Those who have taken the time and effort to wear the robes of the ancient tradition (in all its fullness and folly) would and could see things from a much more nuanced perspective. Grant, as an Anglican, did not nod or bow, in an uncritical way, to the High, Broad or Low church traditions within the Anglican Tradition. Grant, who had been involved with C.S. Lewis's 'Socratic Club', while he was at Oxford, was more committed to *'mere Christianity'* than to parties within the Anglican Tradition. It was this *'mere Christianity'*, grounded and rooted in the mystical theology of the Anglican way that interested and held Grant. Grant had his worries and concerns about the broader drift of liberalism in North America (at its most advanced in the USA), and the invasion of liberalism into the Anglican Church of Canada. Both Merton and Grant addressed, intellectually and spiritually, the clash between the ancients and the moderns.

Merton's interest in a fuller, broader ecumenical vision of the church had much affinity with Grant's interest in *'mere Christianity'*. The liberal ecumenism of the day did not grasp their attention as much as an ecumenism that was grounded in the fullness of the Christian Tradition. Both men turned to the Classical past and mined the mother lode of such a heritage for its present influence. Both men, by turning to the Patristic past, had a certain af-

finity with the Orthodox way. Both Merton and Grant had, in short, an ecumenical and catholic notion of the church that tended to elude the East-West and the Roman Catholic-Protestant schism, and both sought to find the unity at the heart of Christianity.

Grant came to see and argue that at the core of liberalism was a thirst for liberty and individualism, but the dilemma of liberalism was that it had no real grounding or solid way to justify how the individual should use their liberty. Liberalism tended to be insightful and informed on freedom from negative social ills but rather weak on the positive use of freedom. It is this convergence of a rather ill defined and opened ended notion of human nature blended with such principles as liberty, individualism, conscience and equality that made liberalism susceptible to abuse. The actual content of such principles could be as varied as the individual chose to make them. The more the West adopted and adapted such a dogma, the more the church could and would lose its historic voice. Grant saw this on a philosophical level, and he argued, again and again, against the practical implications of not recognizing this fateful and obvious truism. For Grant, the deeper issues were philosophical, and he argued that if issues were not faced by the church at a root level, there would be much confusion and fragmentation at a practical level. This led Grant, by the 1970s, to question the church, as the Anglican Church opened herself more to the questions of abortion and euthanasia. There were for Grant, two levels of discussion: the uncritical social embrace by the church and the secular world of liberal principles and prejudices and, equally important, how these principles played themselves out on such hot button issues as abortion, euthanasia and the family. Grant's position on these issues seemed to collide with his outspoken position against the war in Vietnam, his opposition to militarism, his firm and steady pacifism, his relentless critique of the American empire, his probes into the nature of power elites and the military-industrial complex and the way he illuminated the nature of corporate wealth.

Needless to say, Grant appealed to the political left and right for different reasons, and he was marginalized by the right and left for the same reasons.

Many of Grant's larger social and political positions had much affinity with Merton's. Both men had a broad and fully ecumenical view of the church, and both men had substantive questions about liberalism. Grant tended to be more philosophical than

Merton, and he constantly nudged thinking to the level of political principles. Both men, by turning to the depths of the Christian Tradition, called the church to remember her high calling. Both men spoke from a third way (that was neither right, left nor the sensible centre), and as the church came to reflect the larger culture wars were seen as anomalies. It was this third way that, in many ways, made them prophets to the church and to the world.

V. Merton and Grant: Prophets to the World

Thomas Merton and George Grant were men on the margins. Merton saw his role as a monk in both a literal and metaphorical sense. The monk was very much a man who seemed dead to society, a man on the edge, a misunderstood and alienated person, a person in exile from power and privilege. Merton, as a monk, seeing himself this way, saw other artists and those who protested against the inhumanity of the modern world as his friends and comrades. The monk, in a more metaphorical sense, is the person who says No to the bad faith and false consciousness of the world, lives on the margins for doing so, but speaks a solid and firm Yes to a new vision of life, purpose and meaning. George Grant portrayed a monastic spirituality in the vein of Merton's deeper and more significant sense of it—as one who stands often, alone, against the drift and direction of the world and the church and is faithful, in love, to both.

Both Merton and Grant took positions, on a variety of social, economic and political questions that could not be easily squared with the ideology of the political right, left or centre. Both men stood within the Christian contemplative tradition which was at odds with a secular world that either negated the religious vision, banished it to the private realm or held high contemplative Eastern religious traditions in opposition to the Christian Tradition. Merton and Grant tended to bridge this division and divide, and did it in a way that held out new paths of both approaching Christianity and interfaith dialogue.

Both Merton and Grant had an interest in Mahatma Gandhi, and Gandhi, in his life, threaded together spirituality and justice in a non-violent way and manner. The politics of the right, left and sensible centre tended to dominate the day, and ideologues often marginalized those who did not bow to such positions. Just as Gandhi faced such tensions in his day, Merton and Grant spoke to the world, in a prophetic way, about the horrors of militarism, the

American military industrial complex and the corporate rape of the earth and the environment while taking a faithful stand on the importance of the family and the life of the unborn. The New Left were with Merton and Grant on the former issues, but opposed them on the latter issues just as the New Right were drawn to Grant and Merton on the latter issues but saw them as soft and naïve on the former issues. It was this consistent life ethic that we find in both Merton and Grant that placed them in a unique and distinctive place on the prophetic political spectrum.

Merton tended to side more with the anarchist form of being political, and, in this, he was quite different from Grant. Grant, as a Canadian High Tory, both believed in the need for and commitment to national political parties as a means of bringing into being the common good or the commonweal. Grant was a member of the Progressive Conservative party in Canada for many years, and he was convinced it was the role of the state (with society) to work together in a cooperative way to create a just nation. Merton did not have Grant's commitment to formal party politics, and Merton appealed to the anarchist approach in a way that Grant would have questioned and seriously doubted. It was not that Grant opposed protest and advocacy politics; he did not. He merely thought such a vision of politics was much too reductionistic. But, Merton and Grant did agree that, at that level of theory and hot button issues, there was a need for a political approach that transcended the ideologues of the left, right and center. They did differ on how such ideas could and would be implemented. Merton as an anarchist was strong on protest and moral outrage, but rather weak on serious engagement with political parties. It must be noted that Merton, as a monk, lacked the ability to be engaged in formal party politics. Grant was more involved in the world and, as such, he could and was engaged in national elections and formal party politics. Grant, though, was no uncritical fan of the Progressive Conservative party. In 1988, when the Federal election in Canada was being contested on the 'free trade debate', the Progressive Conservative party was for free trade and the Liberal party was opposed to it. Grant chose to support the Liberal party in their more nationalist stance.

George Grant, like Thomas Merton, spoke to the larger political questions of the 1950s-1960s-1970s and 1980s. The voices of both men continue to live through those who have been drawn to their prophetic vision, a vision that transcends the culture wars

and ethos of political correctness that so dominates much public interaction and discourse these days. Both men mined deeply the wisdom of the past, and brought the insights of such a heritage into the present. Merton did not know much about Canada; hence he had little to say about the Canadian context or situation. Grant knew as much about the USA as Canada, and much of his thought sought to disentangle the Canadian way from both American liberal principles and from the New Rome to the south. Grant's classic missive, *Lament for a Nation: The Defeat of Canadian Nationalism* (1965) remains a standard text in Canada that defines the Canadian way in contrast to the American way. Both Merton and Grant were convinced there were profound moral questions that needed to be faced, but they also realized unless a deeper understanding of human identity and human nature was recovered through a contemplative vision, moral posturing and moral outrage would be a futile gesture.

VI. Thomas Merton and George Grant: Hawk's Dream, Owl's Insight

What was Merton's 'Hawk's Dream' and Grant's 'Owl's Insight'? Both men realized that a return to the contemplative depths was the moral and spiritual imperative of the time. A reversal had occurred in the West, and in this reversal the *'vita activa'* had replaced the *'vita contemplativa'* as the core and centre of life. Merton, as the soaring hawk, and Grant, as the observant owl, called North Americans away from the frenetic and driven protestant work ethic back to the contemplative way. It was in and through the contemplative way that the ego, the fiction and phantom within would be exposed and found wanting. It was in the contemplative way that the deeper eternal self would and could be born and resurrected. This is why, for both Merton and Grant, the cross of suffering was foundational to their thought. There is no new life except through the death and resurrection that the cross of Christ so illuminates for us.

Merton and Grant did turn to the East for contemplative wisdom and insight, but ultimately the depths of the Cross (and its transformative meaning) took both Merton and Grant down a different path than the contemplative traditions of the East. The East spoke much wisdom about the illusions we live by and the need to see through them. But, there was more to living from the new

self than this. The new life in Christ and the Church defined and shaped what the new person could and would be. Merton and Grant were loyal to the church but critical of her accommodation to much of North American culture. Both men had a broad and full catholic vision of the church that was truly ecumenical and concerned with deeper unity. Both men had, from their understanding and experience of the contemplative, a commitment to the church and a passion for public justice and peace. Both men, in short, were apostles and heralds of the inner depths of the contemplative life and the public and political aspects of the prophetic life. Their perspectives were fully integrated and organic, whole and holy. It was this catholic love of the whole that makes both Merton and Grant so appealing to those who long for something deeper, fuller and more integrated than what is often served up on the religious table.

Notes

1. Thomas Merton and Jean Leclercq, *Survival or Prophecy: The Letters of Thomas Merton and Jean Leclercq* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2002), p. XIX.

2. David Cayley, *George Grant in Conversation* (Toronto: Anansi, 1995), p. VII.

3. Thomas Merton, *Conjectures of a Guilty Bystander* (New York: Doubleday, 1966), p. 21.