

ity, her familiarity with simultaneous and intersecting currents of both contemporary environmentalism and “creation spirituality.” Her facility to add depth and texture to any bold fact by exposing its historical, social, cultural, and literary context is also a bonus tutorial of this work.

More so, Weis delivers her own sensitive spiritual insight with characteristic fluidity, letting this book read like a literary fugue resonating with symphonic complexity and lyrical richness. Her rich reportage of Merton’s close encounters with and descent toward the mystical ground of the natural world lets us in on his *eco-poetics* (if that is a term of currency), interpreting for us his “*lingua terra*” (if that might be another): the many languages of his cosmic praise, and the singular voice of his prophetic eco-consciousnesses and conscience. In the end, what Weis leaves us with in this pioneering work is not simply a summary of Merton’s eco-biography, but a comprehensive seminar in the ways and means of inducing our own ecological vision.

Kathleen Deignan, CND

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When I was in theological school in England in the sixties, we began our worship day on Tuesdays with the office of prime at 6:45 a.m., winter and summer. In those long-gone days, the office hymn at prime began: “Now that the daylight fills the sky, / We lift our hearts to God on high.” I found it mildly humorous that in the winter we sang this in the pitch dark, no daylight whatever in evidence. I felt that there was something out of sync about this; and I knew it related to the invention of clocks. But I wasn’t then able to articulate the larger issue behind it. That issue is, of course, the issue of technology, spirituality and ecology, our relationship as spiritual persons in a technologically-driven society to the natural order; and it is that issue which is the subject of *The Environmental Vision of Thomas Merton*, a book which firmly establishes Merton as an ecological pioneer.

I found it appropriate that as I was finishing my reading of this book, it rained all day. This evoked for me Merton’s celebration of the “uselessness” of rain in “Rain and the Rhinoceros,”¹ and brought me close to the reality of the weather, a subject to which Monica Weis gives substantial and thoughtful attention in her book.

1. Thomas Merton, *Raids on the Unspeakable* (New York: New Directions, 1966) 9-23.

She frames weather as both “classroom” (86-89) and as “sign of our essential unity” (89-92). None of us can *escape* the weather: it teaches us throughout our lives about our human capacities and through sun, moon, stars, wind and rain binds us into one global community. I recall that about 40 years ago I was in the smug habit of informing those around me that I was not affected by the weather (!). Contrariwise, Merton had it right: “I myself am part of the weather and part of the climate It is certainly part of my life of prayer” (83). We are in the weather, and the weather is in us, in some sense *is* us.

In his Foreword, James Conner calls the book “timely” (xi) – probably an understatement. Ecological concern continues to rise among the world’s peoples; but one wonders if it is keeping pace with the intensification of the efforts of industrialists to maximize their profits while they can. I write this review short days after the Durban conference of December 2011, the latest in the UN’s series of attempts to nudge the nations of the world into a commitment to ecological seriousness and political action. It was a conference which did come to an agreement among both developed and developing nations on future concerted action; its critics, of course, regard its conclusions as certainly too little and probably too late. The projected Keystone pipeline, designed to begin in the Alberta tar sands, to terminate near the Gulf of Mexico, and to transverse the Ogallala aquifer on the way, is the focus of intense controversy among oil companies, politicians, and committed environmentalists, to say nothing of the people who live along its projected route. It may yet turn out to be a critical issue in the American (I write as a Canadian) presidential election of 2012.

How then did Merton come to hold the ecological vision that crystallized in the last five years of his life? Monica Weis points first to the influence of his childhood in France – Merton being the child of parents themselves committed as artists to seeing and painting the beauty around them – in sections devoted to Prades, St-Antonin and Murat. “Oh Sun! Oh joli!” regularly cries the young Tom (29) – *joli* meaning “pretty” in French, evidencing his attraction to beauty from his earliest years. And then there was Rome, where he was overwhelmed by the beauty and majesty of the Byzantine mosaics. She skips over the English years to his time at Columbia, where she identifies the newly-Roman Catholic Merton’s saying of the Psalms, and his summers in the Allegheny hills with his Columbia buddies as prime occasions of ecological nourishment.

But her larger frame of reference is a contemplative one, focused on the *seeing* which is the fruit of contemplation. "Tread softly," says Christina Rossetti: "All the earth is holy ground. / It may be, could we look with seeing eyes, / This spot we stand on is a Paradise." To live as a contemplative, Merton's life work, is to be present in love and awareness to the present moment, to encounter "the holy in the ordinary" (67), "the transcendent in the immanent" (73), and so to recover Paradise. A journal entry from September 1941, before he entered Gethsemani, asserts his love of nature (41); and another journal entry, from July 1948, when he has been at the abbey for nearly seven years, states that for him, landscape is important for contemplation (43). By then he had made the vow of stability, and Gethsemani became thereby the stable place in which for 27 years (*malgré* his Carthusian and Camaldolese temptations) his love of and appreciation for nature in all its beauty, variety and complexity grew and developed.

Within this ongoing contemplative-ecological process, Monica Weis points to three epiphanic moments: his Fourth and Walnut experience of 1956; his going beyond "the shadow and the disguise" at Polonnaruwa in Sri Lanka in 1968; and between these two, his reading of Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* in 1963, and their ensuing correspondence. I will take it as given that the readers of this review are already acquainted with Fourth and Walnut and with Polonnaruwa. So there is special value in Monica Weis' presentation of Merton's response to *Silent Spring*, beginning with the letter which he wrote to Carson on January 12, 1963, reproduced in full in chapter 1 (14-15). Monica Weis calls it "heartfelt," and characterizes it as a touchstone moment, that is, a moment "when a deep and permanent insight takes root in a person's understanding" (3); and the reading of Carson's book was without doubt this kind of moment for Merton. As the first Roman Catholic cleric in the United States to speak out against the Vietnam War (16), he resonated with her prophetic (i.e. "speaking out") stance, her scientific and global overview, and her belief in the interdependence of all things; and he lamented our human "tendency to destroy and negate [ourselves] when everything is at its best" (17). Already very sensitive to nature in its manifold dimensions, as evidenced by the numerous nature references in the journals, this was the moment when Merton moved "from mere delight in nature to a committed responsibility for its welfare" (4).

As well as in his correspondence and his book reviews, it was

very noticeably in his life of prayer that his spiritual and ecological sensibilities were integrated: I have already quoted Merton's comment that the weather is "part of my life of prayer" (83). An important date to which Monica Weis draws our attention in this regard was June 27, 1949, when Merton had been at Gethsemani for almost eight years. It was on that day that Abbot James Fox permitted Merton to go beyond the confines of the common cloistered area to pray. It was also important for him, and the Trappist *horarium* made this possible, to be awake and ready for prayer when the world in general (except for most of its human beings) awoke to a new day, to a renewal of creation. Readers of Merton will here immediately recall the marvelous opening to Part Three of *Conjectures of a Guilty Bystander*, "The Night Spirit and the Dawn Air,"² with its reflections on the first hint of sunrise as the *point vierge* of the day. Monica Weis's section (58-63) on the *point vierge* is particularly good, as she relates the temporal *point vierge* of this passage to the mystical *point vierge* described in the Fourth and Walnut section of *Conjectures*. As Merton uses it, the phrase can refer either to the break of dawn or to the inner and divine spark in each of us, to the daily moment of cosmic re-creation or to the inner place of personal re-creation.

Prayer and nature also come close to each other in Merton's praying of the office. Zen photography was a spiritual practice for him, a form of visual prayer (117-20), as he photographed scenes and objects on the monastery grounds without posing or arranging them, accepting them contemplatively as they were, kissing each object, we might say, with his camera, as righteousness and peace kiss each other in the psalm (85:10). Certainly the nature-imagery of the Psalms would have been reinforced by his saying of the office outdoors, as he sometimes did (109):

the office is entirely different in its proper (natural) setting, out from under the fluorescent lights. There [in the monastery] Lauds is torpor and vacuum. Here [at the hermitage] it is in harmony with all the singing birds under the bright sky. Everything you have on your lips in praising God is there before you – hills, dew, light, birds, growing things I saw in the middle of the Benedicite the great presence of the sun that had just risen behind the cedars And now under

2. Thomas Merton, *Conjectures of a Guilty Bystander* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1966) 117-18.

the pines the sun has made a great golden basilica of fire and water. (106-107)³

His mention of the *Benedicite*⁴ gives me an opportunity to lament its loss in recent years from Anglican liturgy. Morning Prayer in its traditional form, the Anglican counterpart to monastic lauds, in which the *Benedicite* is found, is less and less celebrated because of the entirely justifiable restoration of the Eucharist to its proper place as the norm of Sunday worship. At the same time, its absence from general Anglican practice at a time of increasing ecological concern is, in my view, a real loss. Its calling upon every element of the cosmos – sun, moon, stars, waters, animals, birds, whales and various categories of human beings – holds up to the consciousness of those who use it as perhaps does no other part of scripture except Genesis 1 the glory and variety of the creation within which we are the worshipping cohort. The monks will have to continue to offer it on our behalf!

I find support for this last comment in a quotation which Monica Weis gives us from Merton's review article "Wilderness and Paradise," reprinted in a posthumous collection of essays, *The Monastic Journey*:⁵

If the monk is a man whose whole life is built around a deeply religious appreciation of his call to wilderness and paradise, and thereby to a special kind of kinship with God's creatures . . . and if technological society is constantly encroaching upon and destroying the remaining "wildernesses" . . . [then monks] would seem to be destined by God, in our time, to be not only dwellers in the wilderness also but its protectors. (145)

This was precisely the historical act of ecological stewardship undertaken by the monks and hermits of Camaldoli, to which in the mid-fifties Merton was strongly attracted and hoped to move. Founded a thousand years ago (1012), the Camaldolese over the centuries developed so refined a code for the care of the great forest

3. Thomas Merton, *Turning Toward the World: The Pivotal Years. Journals, vol. 4: 1960-1963*, ed. Victor A. Kramer (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1996) 140.

4. Daniel 3:52-90 in Roman Catholic Bibles; included in the Apocrypha in other versions, found in the book variously titled "The Song of the Three," or "The Song of the Three Young Men," or "The Song of the Three Jews"; Dan. 3:62 (Song 40) refers to the sun, as does Merton "in the middle of the *Benedicite*."

5. Thomas Merton, *The Monastic Journey*, ed. Brother Patrick Hart (Kansas City: Sheed, Andrews & McMeel, 1977) 144-50.

of Casentino in which Camaldoli is located that when Italy became a unified nation in the 1860s, it adopted the code of Camaldoli as the basis of its national forest code. I do not know whether Merton knew of this, although it is possible, given his keen interest in Camaldoli; but certainly it would only have elicited his praise.

Some special appreciations. I have already mentioned the section on the *point vierge*. To this I would add Monica Weis's delightful reflections on Merton as raven (6-8) – certainly, like his soul-brother, Leonard Cohen, at least in its trickster dimension; and then on Merton's own self-identification with the bobwhite as his totem bird (110). We can subsume both images into Merton's description of himself, in a letter to M., as "a wild being" (164), himself part of the wilderness reality, the holy desert which he saw as essential to the flourishing of his spirit. And finally the Afterword (157-65): a delightful weaving together of a symphonic structure with Merton's journal references to the deer who lived in the vicinity of the hermitage.

Now some concerns, some wonderings. At the beginning of Chapter 3, "Spots of Time," the author places this epigraph: "Sometimes we see a kind of truth all at once, in a flash, in a whole" (48) – Merton's description of what earlier she has called "a touchstone moment." She sources this in Merton's Columbia University class notes; but two pages later, she cites it as part of a quotation from Merton's journal entry of April 9, 1941, when he was at Gethsemani for Holy Week. Which, then, is correct? Then on page 112, she refers to Victor Hammer's well-known painting as portraying "Mary placing a crown on the head of the Child Jesus in her arms." Patrick F. O'Connell's article on *Hagia Sophia* in *The Thomas Merton Encyclopedia* gives a different account. The painting actually portrays Jesus as a boy, standing on his own, rather than being in his mother's arms; and Hammer, having originally thought of the feminine figure as Mary *simpliciter*, told Merton that he was no longer sure of her identity. Merton thereupon identified her as Holy Wisdom, *Hagia Sophia*, "whom Mary represented [italics mine] in bestowing the crown of human nature upon Christ."⁶

Related to this incarnational motif is the author's statement that in one sentence in his letter to Rachel Carson, Merton encapsulates "the essence of incarnational thinking: because the Divine

6. Patrick F. O'Connell, "Hagia Sophia," in William H. Shannon, Christine M. Bochen and Patrick F. O'Connell, *The Thomas Merton Encyclopedia* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2002) 191.

in its unending creativity has inserted itself into life on Earth, everything that is, is holy; . . . consequently, each being is related to and interdependent with every other being" (129). This sentence of Merton's to which she refers is as follows: "The whole world itself, to religious thinkers, has always appeared as a transparent manifestation of the love of God, as a 'paradise' of His wisdom, manifested in all His creatures, down to the tiniest, and in the wonderful interrelationship between them" (129; cf. 14). Later she says that "the ultimate unity and interdependence of all being" has been "solemnized and made holy by the incarnate Jesus," quoting in support of this Paul's reference to Jesus as "the firstborn of all creation" in whom "all things hold together" (Col. 1:15-17) (134). What concerns me here is that her comment, particularly because of the term "inserted," could be read as implying that creation was not holy before the historical time of the Incarnation, whereas manifestly the Hebrew Bible throughout testifies to the sacredness of the earth as God's creation. I doubt that this is what she means, and there is no support in Merton's sentence for this view; but some clarification here would be appropriate. I would add to Paul's word that of John 1, with its exposition of the meaning of the Word as that power of God through which all things come to be. So it is ultimately the cosmic Christ who in Jesus of Nazareth pitches his tent among us (John 1:14), in whom and from whom everything that is takes its holy character.

Finally, a quibble more than a wondering. In speaking of the "thin places" precious to the Celts, she calls them "the margins between the natural and the supernatural worlds" (139). I had been wondering as I read a book about nature whether the word "supernatural" would appear; and the fact that it makes only one appearance I find significant. Thomas Berry and others have taught us that there is only one cosmos, in which (in the language of the Nicene Creed) both visible and invisible realities coinhere, rather than the sharply defined territories of natural and supernatural of which our medieval theological ancestors spoke. With the ancient framers of the Creed, I would opt for the use of the terms "visible and invisible" as referring simply to the two dimensions of the one cosmos. The best expression of this in the Merton corpus, in my opinion, is his 1965 gem, *Day of a Stranger*,⁷ a rich, dense, ironic, even mischievous piece. In this magnificent brief work, Merton

7. Thomas Merton, *Day of a Stranger* (Salt Lake City: Gibbs M. Smith, 1981); subsequent references will be cited as "DS" parenthetically in the text.

describes himself as someone who lives in “ecological balance” (DS 33) with the many pairs of birds which live near his hermitage, and who also enjoys “a mental ecology, too, a living balance of spirits” (DS 35) available to him through his readings. Here there is no nature-supernature split. It integrates nature and society, creation and culture, and all worlds visible and invisible. The *contemptus mundi* with which he entered the monastery in 1941 is long gone, and heaven and earth are one.

And a few *corrigenda*, in case of a second printing. For Charles Lear (6), read Edward Lear (the author, to exonerate her, is depending on Robert Daggy’s misnaming here);⁸ for “Papales” (70), read “Papeles”; for “red tooth and claw” (76), read “red in tooth and claw” (from Tennyson’s *In Memoriam*, section 56, line 15); for “orthodoxy” (97), read “[Eastern] Orthodoxy”; for “Trappist,” read “Trappistine,” since Redwoods is a community of nuns, although the communities of both men and women in its monastic family now tend to favor the older term, “Cistercian” (119); for “Buddhist” (138), read “Jain” (Joanna Macy is a Buddhist, but the concept of *ahimsa* is originally Jain); for “Justice, Peace, and Creation” (the first title of the WCC program, from 1983) (155), read “Justice, Peace and the Integrity of Creation” (the final form of the title as used at the WCC’s Canberra assembly in 1991); and for “wildness” (162), read “wilderness.”

Particularly after the publication of *Peace in the Post-Christian Era*,⁹ the readers of Merton, I among them, might have assumed that Merton regarded nuclear weapons as the greatest threat to the integrity of creation. So I was at first surprised to read Merton’s statement that the most crucial aspect of Christian obedience in his time concerned “the responsibility of the Christian in technological society toward God’s creation”; but he quickly follows this in declaring that the “problem of nuclear war is only one facet of an immense, complex and unified problem” (141). Seen in context, nuclear weapons are not only a political threat, but even more, are

8. Thomas Merton, *Dancing in the Water of Life: Seeking Peace in the Hermitage. Journals, vol. 5: 1963-1965*, ed. Robert E. Daggy (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1997) xi. Thanks to Mark Meade of the Thomas Merton Center at Bellarmine University for checking on this, and informing me that Merton, in the notebook to which Daggy and Weis refer, only wrote the name “Lear” underneath the limerick which Daggy quotes. Daggy himself must have added the “Charles” (email, January 3, 2012).

9. Thomas Merton, *Peace in the Post-Christian Era*, ed. Patricia A. Burton (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2004).

weapons the global use of which, as we know, would constitute an ecological disaster of the highest order, just as the International Physicians for the Prevention of Nuclear War (IPPNW) have characterized this ghastly possibility in relation to their own profession as constituting the most serious public health challenge possible.

The late and much-lamented Vaclav Havel, post-Soviet president of Czechoslovakia, and its western successor state, the Czech Republic, offers us all an overarching word on the ecological crisis. It will not be resolved, he says, until the global community has recovered a sense of the earth as sacred. Merton's sense of this, ripening gradually from the time of his childhood in France until it was jolted into intentionality by his reading of *Silent Spring*, quickly moved to a place of committed responsibility, as must ours. Monica Weis ends her book with a call to the development of the same kind of ecological conscience, the kind that leads to action. Her book is a welcome addition to the literature of the movement for the recovery of the earth's sacredness, a movement which in its largest sense challenges us all to act on behalf of the integrity, the shalom of creation.

Donald Grayston

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I am grateful to editors David Belcastro and Gray Matthews for the invitation to participate in this review symposium of my new book, *The Environmental Vision of Thomas Merton*, and I am doubly indebted to colleagues Donald St. John, Bonnie Thurston, Kathleen Deignan and Donald Grayston for being willing to read the text closely, offer their insights, and suggest next steps for this initial foray into the influence of nature on Merton's spirituality. My hope is that my exploration of Merton's writings, primarily his journals, will nudge other scholars to build on this foundation and expand our collective appreciation for the wide spectrum of Merton's interests and concerns.

In this response, I will speak to the large issues raised by several of the reviewers, and then to particular points. Since this is a book about Merton's interaction with nature, I want to emphasize not only the importance of discovering a responsibility to and for nature, that sprang from his solitude and contemplation, but also his evolving prophetic stance on ecology in the turbulent 1960s. That said, I applaud Donald St. John for affirming that Merton "anticipates and articulates the basic position of *radical* ecology." He is, indeed a forefather of the movement later known as deep