

## Reviews

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*The Letters of Thomas Merton and Victor and Carolyn Hammer: Ad Majorem Dei Gloriam* edited by F. Douglas Scutchfield and Paul Holbrook Jr., with a foreword by Paul M. Pearson (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2014), pp. xviii + 333. ISBN 978-0-8131-5352-0 (cloth) \$40.

*The Letters of Robert Giroux and Thomas Merton* edited by Patrick Samway, SJ, with a foreword by Jonathan Montaldo (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2015), pp. x + 397. ISBN 978-0-268-01786-6 (paper) \$29.

Thomas Merton's dedicated readers have roadmaps through his life and writings. Surely we all care for the deliberately autobiographical writings and the long autobiography of the journals, and many of us have read the collections of his correspondence – scarcely minding the absence of the other side of the exchange because Merton writes so richly. Further, each of us has favorite books of essays, spiritual reflection or poetry, and there our roadmaps diverge. And who among us isn't aware of unilluminated zones: events, themes or persons in his life that we know to be vivid and important though little documented. One can only guess at where the road might lead. Therefore how good that two such destinations for the mind are now fully documented: Merton's deep friendship with the artists and fine printers Victor and Carolyn Hammer, and his decades-long working friendship with the great American publisher Robert Giroux.

These are books of correspondence to and from, covering nearly Merton's entire period of authorship where Giroux is concerned and the years 1955 through 1968 for the Hammers. In such long cycles of correspondence faithfully edited and brilliantly annotated, there can't help but be trivia – when can we meet at Gethsemani or in Lexington, are the typos corrected, what font will be used? – but there are also white-hot moments of creativity, concern and striving when issues vaguely marked on existing roadmaps come into sharp and welcome focus. They become part of Merton's life-experience in which we now can share. A notable example is Merton's dialogue with the Hammers on the theme of Victor Hammer's remarkable painting "Hagia Sophia Crowning the Young Christ" (1953-56), closely related to Merton grandest prose-poem, *Hagia Sophia*, first published on the Hammers' press in 1962.

In the Giroux volume, the most notable example is the battle over

Church censorship of *The Sign of Jonas* (1953): close readers of Merton knew something of it but could have no notion of its day-to-day texture, its human cost of anguish and hope. “A real bombshell has been dropped on us,” Giroux wrote in September 1952. “The Superior of an English monastery, who has read the manuscript for the Abbot General, apparently takes the position that the diary form is not appropriate. If this position is upheld, there can of course be no book called THE SIGN OF JONAS” (137). Merton replied: “Bob, I am sorry I let you go ahead and set the book up. . . . [T]he thing was by no means as certain as I hoped. . . . We will have to foot the bill, of course. I had better go on bread and water for a while. And hide in a cave. What could be better?” (138). Merton’s future authorship was at stake, as he well knew; so did Giroux.

Beyond such episodes of deep reflection or crisis, both books of correspondence convey another texture, that of friendship among like-minded, vastly capable people who always found time to encourage one another, to share joy and sorrow, to be of service. Occasional crisis and much kindness: men and women finding their way. These are books for every close reader of Merton’s life and writings. They are similar to archives: hundreds of documents that cumulatively convey temperaments and the progress of projects, but also moments of exchange when a very great deal was at stake.

Roger Lipsey

MERTON, Thomas, *Medieval Monastic Movements* (Introduction by Dr. James Finley + 6 Talks: 3 CDs); *An Introduction to the Cistercian Order* (Introduction by Fr. Anthony Ciorra + 7 Talks: 3 CDs); *Thomas Merton and St. Bernard of Clairvaux* (Introduction by Dr. James Finley + 4 Talks: 2 CDs); *St. Thomas Aquinas and “The Ways of God”* (Introduction by Fr. Anthony Ciorra + 5 Talks: 3 CDs); *Thomas Merton on Contemplation* [revised] (Introduction by Fr. Anthony Ciorra + 6 Talks: 4 CDs); *Thomas Merton on Sufism* [revised] (Introduction by Fr. Anthony Ciorra + 13 Talks: 7 CDs) (Rockville, MD: Now You Know Media, 2014).

The year 2014 saw a considerably reduced amount of material newly issued by Now You Know Media as compared with the first two years of the company’s project of making available sets of recordings of Thomas Merton’s conferences and other oral presentations taped during the final six and a half years of his life (April 1962 through December 1968). Four new sets of conferences were released, a total of twenty presentations (along with two revised sets incorporating eight previously unavailable talks), whereas in 2012 the company had issued nine different sets with