

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

81 presentations,¹ and in the following year eight sets with 41 conference presentations as well as 31 segments of varying length on tapes made for women's religious communities.² Perhaps this less rapid rate of publication was intended to keep the potential audience from being overwhelmed by the abundance of material and so better to align supply with demand. In any case, all four new sets consist in conferences on medieval history and spirituality given to the novices at the Abbey of Gethsemani between mid-1962 and mid-1964.

The two sets entitled *Medieval Monastic Movements* and *An Introduction to the Cistercian Order* are in fact parts of the same course, given in the second half of 1962, though this is not made clear in the introduction to either set, perhaps because they were given by two different presenters – the second by Fr. Anthony Ciorra, who had introduced the majority of the previously released sets, and the first by Dr. James Finley, well-known author of *Merton's Palace of Nowhere*³ and a former Gethsemani novice who had actually been present at these conferences.

Finley's rather brief introduction gives an overview of some of the significant turning points of Merton's life for the benefit of those coming to Merton for the first time, before looking at the series of conferences providing historical background for the founding of the Cistercian Order. He emphasizes, drawing on his own experience at Gethsemani, the sense of presence that is provided by these recordings of Merton's own voice, comparable to hearing St. Bernard speaking on the Song of Songs or St. Benedict on the *Rule* (assigned to the eleventh and fifth centuries respectively – the dating throughout this introduction is a bit hazy). He also points out the fact that there were no "good old days" for monasticism or for the Church generally – no escape from history and its challenges and tensions – but that not only did the history of Europe shape monasticism, but monasticism also shaped the history of Europe, witnessing to the light of God's presence in the passage through time. The talks themselves, after a salutary reminder of the demands entailed in historical study, begin with a brief retrospective look at the earliest days of Benedictine monastic life and the eventual establishment of the Benedictine *Rule* as normative under Charlemagne and St. Benedict of Aniane. Merton then turns to the reestablishment of monastic life in Anglo-Saxon England under St. Dunstan in the tenth century, along with the significance of the provisions of the *Regularis Concordia* formulated at the Synod of Winchester in 970; the achievements

1. See the omnibus review of these recordings in *The Merton Annual* 26 (2013) 220-32.

2. See the omnibus review of these recordings in *The Merton Annual* 27 (2014) 220-32.

3. James Finley, *Merton's Palace of Nowhere: A Search for God through Awareness of the True Self* (Notre Dame, IN: Ave Maria Press, 1978; 25th Anniversary Edition, 2003).

as well as the limitations of the Abbey of Cluny and its hundreds of dependent monasteries during its Golden Age from the tenth through the twelfth centuries; and the development of Norman monasticism and its coming to England under Lanfranc and St. Anselm after the Conquest in the mid-eleventh century. He stresses from the outset that this material is intended not as a comprehensive survey of medieval monasticism but as a context for considering the rise of Cistercianism, though the emphasis on England in these talks is no doubt motivated more by its presumed interest for an English-speaking audience than for its strict relevance to the foundation of a French-based monastic reform (and probably also by the appearance of an article entitled “Some Notes on English Monastic Origins”⁴ at the beginning of 1962 – not mentioned in the talks but extensively summarized in Merton’s own notes for these conferences).

Fr. Ciorra’s introduction to what is in fact the second half of this course draws on Merton’s books *The Waters of Siloe*⁵ and *The Silent Life*⁶ (along with the pamphlet *Cistercian Contemplatives*⁷) to highlight Merton’s consistent focus on the contemplative dimension of the Order in its origins and early development as contrasted with the stress on penance and ascetical exercises in the seventeenth-century Trappist reform. He points out Merton’s own contribution to the reorientation of the Order due to renewed awareness of primitive ideals in the mid-twentieth century, through both his writings and his formation work. In these seven remaining conferences Merton considers the circumstances that led the first Cistercians to leave the Abbey of Molesme in order to live a monastic life more reflective of both the letter and spirit of the *Rule* of St. Benedict; the contributions of the three founding fathers of Cîteaux – Sts. Robert, Alberic and Stephen Harding; the controversy surrounding the return of Robert to Molesme, particularly as it is found in the negative presentation given in a suppressed and newly rediscovered section of the *Exordium Magnum*, a late twelfth-century compendium of stories of the first century of Cistercian life; a detailed consideration of various versions (not completely accurate in light of subsequent scholarship) of the key official documents *Exordium Parvum* and *Carta Caritatis*; and consideration of the particular Cistercian modality of monastic spirituality as emphasizing poverty and solitude in community, withdrawn from worldly business to

4. Thomas Symons, OSB, “Some Notes on English Monastic Origins,” *Downside Review* 80 (1962) 55-69.

5. Thomas Merton, *The Waters of Siloe* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1949).

6. Thomas Merton, *The Silent Life* (New York: Farrar, Straus & Cudahy, 1957).

7. Thomas Merton, *Cistercian Contemplatives: A Guide to Trappist Life* (Trappist, KY: Abbey of Gethsemani, 1948).

remote and rugged locations. While specific dates are not provided for this course (the second set simply includes “1962” parenthetically on the case), it is clear from Merton’s remarks at the conclusion of the final conference that he “won’t get back to this” and that “next year” they would do “something different,” that the year was coming to an end, so even allowing for some missed weeks it is evident that the course (given on Fridays, he mentions at some point in passing) was presented in the second half of 1962, definitely one of the briefer novitiate classes, which typically ran for a year or more. He probably decided to stop at this point because at the beginning of 1963 the choir and brothers novitiates were being combined, and the new monastic formation program would find the newly professed monks attending Merton’s classes as well, so he considered that it was preferable to start afresh with a new subject.

One of the new courses that Merton began in January 1963 was on the Cistercian Fathers, specifically St. Bernard, the source of a third set of recordings issued by Now You Know in 2014. As these four talks focus on the life of Bernard as presented by his friend and biographer William of St. Thierry and on some of Bernard’s own letters on monastic vocation, they appear to be a logical sequel to the early Cistercian conferences, but in fact they were the last of fifty-four conferences on the great twelfth-century abbot and spiritual theologian, and were not presented until a year and a half later, from June 20 through August 8, 1964.⁸ Merton considers Bernard’s own conversion after an extensive discussion (in conferences preceding this group) of his celebrated sermon *De Conversione*; examines the genre of hagiography, comparing William’s treatment of Bernard with an article on President Lyndon Johnson from *Time* magazine and looking at the way monastic theology is conveyed by William through a life story; identifies idolatry as the fundamental problem in Bernard’s time and the present day; and warns the novices that while Bernard’s unique gifts of nature and grace cannot be replicated, his generosity and self-surrender are a model for all Cistercians. He concludes this set of conferences by considering a few of Bernard’s vocation letters as providing a good source of insight into Bernard’s personality and into the complex interactions among monasteries in the early decades of Cistercianism. Like that for *Medieval Monastic Movements*, Finley’s introduction to this set is brief, largely biographical, and not quite accurate chronologically (the publication date for *The Seven Storey Mountain* is two years too early; the

8. For a discussion of the recorded conferences in relation to Merton’s written text for this course, see the Introduction to Thomas Merton, *The Cistercian Fathers and Their Monastic Theology: Initiation into the Monastic Tradition 8*, edited by Patrick F. O’Connell (Collegeville, MN: Cistercian Publications, 2016) ci-cvii.

work of Benedict [b. 480] is once again put in the fifth century, and that of Bernard [b. 1090] in the eleventh). He concludes with some helpful comments about the contemporary relevance of Bernard's concern with idolatry as encompassing any tendency to locate one's ultimate meaning and destiny in something other than God (and with encouragement to his audience to look up the Merton Society on the internet).

The final new set of conferences for 2014 is a group of five talks on *The Ways of God*, a short treatise attributed to Thomas Aquinas for which Merton intended to make a new translation, an older one no longer being in print (plans which evidently were not realized). Fr. Ciorra provides a very helpful introduction that traces Merton's earliest acquaintance with Thomas in the work of Étienne Gilson (though he does not touch on the equally important influence of Jacques Maritain); summarizes the teaching of Aquinas on the nature of God as single, perfect, infinite, immutable and one, as explained at length in the *Summa Theologiae* (which Merton does not directly consider in these conferences); and then turns to the *Ways of God* itself, pointing out (as Merton does not) that it may well not be by Thomas himself but is certainly (as Raïssa Maritain notes in her preface to the earlier English translation) a faithful interpretation of his teaching. He explains that the work discusses 22 particular qualities of God and how human persons, made in the divine image, are called to imitate these qualities, and points out that these talks consist in Merton's reflections on many of these qualities and how they can and should be applied to life in the monastery. Thus in the first conference Merton focuses on the divine immutability as a model for human constancy amid the vicissitudes of life, a stability of spirit that is intrinsically linked with patience, tolerance and an understanding of the frailty of others. God's own patience, justice, rectitude, longanimity, mercy, generosity and forgiveness are highlighted in subsequent conferences, with an overall emphasis on God's abiding love for all created reality that should likewise be the hallmark of Christian and particularly of monastic spirituality. The series as a whole, not a complete course but a sort of interlude between courses, from March and early April, 1963, finds and presents a model for Merton's own "turn toward the world" during this last decade of his life in the teaching of St. Thomas, and stresses the relevance of this teaching for a vision of monastic life that rejects a rigid exaltation of abstract norms over concrete people, of the letter of the law over the needs of one's brothers, of a zeal for regularity over the demands of charity, a pattern of life that reflects God's own infinite care for creation.

The revised version of *Thomas Merton on Contemplation* is identifiable only by a new copyright date and a note in small print on the

case that “This second edition . . . contains 2 new, previously unreleased lectures.” The four original presentations are rearranged, now presented in chronological order, with newly attached dates and somewhat altered titles. Fr. Ciorra provides a completely new introduction which is an excellent preparation not only for this series but for the Now You Know recordings generally, presenting Merton as a many-sided Christian teacher whose influence flows from the quality of his experience and the clarity of his literary expression; suggests a division of his religious life into three periods: the monastic period (1941-48) when he concentrated on the interior life; the Church period (1948-60) when he brought the contemplative life to the wider Christian community; the global period (1960-68) when he embraced the world in his teaching on social issues and his interaction with other religious traditions; he then looks briefly at the topics of the six presentations included in this group of recordings, noting that they are selections from the whole range of his conferences, not a coherent series as most of the other releases have been, and proposes that the three key theological and spiritual themes found here and throughout the conferences in general are contemplation, solitude and purity of heart. One of the recordings in the previous edition, a tape made for novices of the Sisters of Loretto subsequently included in another release,⁹ has been dropped and replaced by two new talks: the first, on “Dealing with Distractions in Prayer” from June 14, 1964, is perhaps a somewhat strange choice as its topic as indicated in the title deals not primarily with the contemplative dimension of prayer but with traditional monastic ways of overcoming distractions, but particularly because it is based on a pair of monastic dialogues from the sixth century, the first of which, never identified, had begun to be discussed in a previous conference, so that the listener has the impression of arriving in the middle of a conversation and so finding oneself rather disoriented and uncertain of the context if not of the content of the material. The second addition is probably the best known of Merton’s novitiate conferences, that given on August 20, 1965, the day he retired as novice master to take up full-time residence in his hermitage, given the title “A Life Free from Care,”¹⁰ and focused on how the life of solitude can and should be a fully integrated dimension of monastic life; unfortunately the last couple of minutes of the presentation were left out of the recording as originally issued, omitting

9. Thomas Merton, *Prayer and Growth in the Christian Life* (Rockville, MD: Now You Know Media, 2013) n. 2: “Balance and Grace.”

10. The transcript of this conference was published as Thomas Merton, “A Life Free from Care,” *Cistercian Studies* 5 (1970) 217-27; substantial excerpts are included in Thomas Merton, *Essential Writings*, edited by Christine M. Bochen (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2000) 67-72.

Merton's famous concluding description of the hermit as one "kissed by God," which Fr. Ciorra had explicitly mentioned in his introduction. This omission has since been remedied by the publisher.

No notice is provided (other than an altered copyright date) on the case or elsewhere that the series entitled *Thomas Merton on Sufism* is also now issued in revised form, but a comparison of the titles of the conferences indicates significant differences have been introduced. Fr. Ciorra's helpful introduction, unaltered, is now followed by a presentation entitled "Introduction to Sufi Thought," which is indeed the previously missing opening talk on Sufism, given by Merton on April 23, 1967. Here Merton begins by warning his audience not to let anyone give them a "course" on Sufism and notes his own "folly" in attempting to speak about it, all pointing toward the paradoxical nature of this Muslim mystical movement. He provides a brief overview of Islam and its emphasis on the unity of God, the tension between exoteric and esoteric, legal and contemplative strands in the tradition, and the affirmation of God in Sufism as both absolutely other (*tanzih*) and manifested in all created things (*tashbih*) and so accessible through imagination. The three following talks are all found in the earlier edition, but then five missing presentations (from June 18 through September 17, 1967) are newly included. "Finding Direction" focuses on the distinction in Sufi thought between states – gifts of God – and stations – areas of spiritual development requiring personal effort. "Satisfaction in Asceticism: States and Stations" continues this discussion, comparing the stations of the ascetic life in Sufism to the teaching found in John Cassian – both emphasizing freedom from compulsion: purity of heart in Cassian's monastic terminology, "satisfaction" in Sufi parlance. "Awakening to Repentance" notes that the different ascetic stages in Sufism are more technical and more evolved than in Christianity; in summary, repentance of serious sin leads to obedience, of minor sin to love, and finally of being other than God – or more precisely of experiencing oneself as separate from God – to complete self-forgetfulness. "Navigating States of Asceticism" looks at the Sufi effort to discover one's particular, appropriate, unique state, which is then no longer experienced as one's own because it is essentially God's state, where God and only God is truly present. "The Lucidity of Poverty" stresses the centrality of poverty to Sufi asceticism and the purpose of poverty as lucidity, a clarity of vision once one is no longer blinded by possessions, material attachments, perceived "needs" – a model and inspiration for understanding monastic poverty. This conference is then followed by the next four from the original set (though in each case the title has been changed so they are not immediately perceived as identical). At this point the revised collection simply

stops – dropping, inexplicably, the final six conferences (from December 3, 1967 through June 16, 1968) found in the 2012 set! Thus each version contains thirteen talks, seven in common and six unique to each, with no indication of these alterations and of course no explanation for the startling omission of the concluding sequence of conferences previously provided. It seems as if Now You Know decided to limit the revised version to the same number of talks as its predecessor, which was accomplished by the arbitrary elimination of the final six presentations – a most peculiar and disconcerting procedure, particularly since no indication is provided that this has been done, or even that the 2014 release in fact differs from that of 2012. One would hope that greater transparency could be provided for actual and prospective customers, and perhaps even that some way could be found for those who purchased the original versions of these two sets to obtain the newly available presentations without having to buy the entire revised version (or in the case of the Sufi series, for those buying the 2014 release to obtain the material from 2012 now no longer available)

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HORAN, Daniel P., OFM, *The Franciscan Heart of Thomas Merton: A New Look at the Spiritual Inspiration of His Life, Thought, and Writing* (Notre Dame, IN: Ave Maria Press, 2014), pp. xxvi + 261. ISBN 978-1-59471-422-1 (paper) \$16.95.

I am taken aback at how much I enjoyed and appreciated this new study because of the more intense focus employed by Daniel Horan on the Franciscan foundations that undergird Thomas Merton’s monastic vocation and key elements of his literary legacy. The heart of this young priest and Franciscan’s new good book are Parts II and III.

In Part II, “Franciscan Foundations,” Horan employs well-documented research to present a time-line that is expansive and detailed of Merton’s developing interest in becoming a priest and Franciscan after his baptism at the age of twenty-three. He highlights more strongly than anyone has heretofore the role and friendship of Daniel Walsh in mentoring the new convert to Roman Catholicism and in introducing Merton to the philosophical writings of Franciscan medieval philosopher John Duns Scotus (d. 1308) on whom Walsh had written his doctoral dissertation. Scotus plays a large role in Horan’s book as an influence on some of Merton’s key ideas, for instance, on the true and false selves as elaborated and introduced by Merton in *New Seeds of Contemplation*.

After recounting the circumstances that led Merton not to enter the Franciscan novitiate in 1940 and his subsequently taking a teaching job