

Extending the Frontier: A Bibliographic Review of 2020

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“Everywhere you go will be somewhere
You’ve never been.”

Natasha Tretheway¹

Three months from the time of this writing, Thomas Merton will have been dead for fifty-three years, the same number as his age at the time of his passing. That is the kind of detail one tends to note about a deceased family member, friend or, in this case, celebrated figure whom countless people know only through his bountiful legacy of words and images – a spiritual ancestor to generations of believers and searchers. While many additional works have been posthumously published over the years, Thomas Merton – obviously – has not uttered a word since he entered the great silence on December 10, 1968. Still, it has become somewhat common for readers of Merton, even those born long after he died, to remark on the immediate resonance of his voice today. And as the moral universe persists in its long, slow bend toward justice, and Merton scholars periodically take the pulse of Merton’s relevance at points along that arc, the perceptions found in his multi-genre body of work continue to elicit awe in readers old and new. Indeed, his authorial presence, notwithstanding the occasional tonal and lexical echoes of the less inclusive era in which he wrote, at its core can still impress readers as strikingly ageless, and, in certain frameworks, reborn.

According to custom, the following bibliographic survey of materials published in 2020 summarizes selected contributions to Merton studies that deliver fresh takes on familiar subject matter and themes in the Merton canon. The survey also points out some compelling applications of Merton’s wisdom to the indisputably “interesting times” of the year 2020, existential crises of the human condition represented in events and terminology unknowable to Merton, yet rooted in violation of truths to which he bore profound witness more than a half-century ago. While situating Thomas Merton, or any revered writer from the past, in a contemporary setting and citing him in discussions of current complex and

1. Natasha Tretheway, “Theories of Time and Space,” *Native Guard: Poems* (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 2006) 1.

highly-charged issues runs the risk of wishful-thinking fallacies, when undertaken with the intellectual integrity demonstrated in specified works surveyed below, such portrayals can open avenues to his as-yet-untapped spiritual guidance for today's troubling times – and those that lie ahead.

Books by Merton

This segment of the review begins with two works of primary material, underscoring the message that half a century after his death, Merton's creative resources continue to reward the industry of archivists, researchers and scholarly editors. Illustrating this point is Patrick F. O'Connell's *A Monastic Introduction to Sacred Scripture: Novitiate Conferences on Scripture and Liturgy 1*,² in which O'Connell once again employs his impeccable skills in the first in a trilogy of editions of Merton's monastic conferences on sacred scripture and liturgy. O'Connell annotates the existing lecture material that Merton used in teaching the groups of monks for whom he was responsible at the Abbey of Gethsemani, first as Master of Scholastics and later as Master of Novices, and provides a generous introduction of documented details, illuminating enhancements and cogent commentary, all of which work in unison to reveal how Merton's developing views about scripture parallel the trajectory of his contemplative path. O'Connell's instructive voice, in well-placed summations of complex material, lends accessibility for the general reader to such challenging, specialized subject matter. This and other of O'Connell's superb editions make me recall the principal textbook in my grad school course in bibliographic scholarship, Richard Altick's *The Art of Literary Research*,³ in which the author describes textual editing as "detail work . . . in which no margin of error is allowed and over which the analytic intellect must constantly preside," work that is not an "occupation for the impatient or the careless." Altick cautions that such an editor "must not only be capable" of this demanding work – "he [or she] must actually relish it" (Altick 13). I suggest that O'Connell is a living example of Altick's model textual editor, a combination of erudition, endurance and precision; and considering that *A Monastic Introduction to Sacred Scripture* is O'Connell's thirteenth, but not his last, scholarly edition of Merton's work, it is easy to conclude that he finds fulfillment in this exacting task. For more discussion of the book, see Peter Vale's review

2. *A Monastic Introduction to Sacred Scripture: Novitiate Conferences on Scripture and Liturgy 1*, edited with an introduction by Patrick F. O'Connell (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2020).

3. Richard Altick, *The Art of Literary Research*, Revised Ed. (New York: W. W. Norton, 1975); subsequent references will be cited as "Altick" parenthetically in the text.

in this volume of *The Merton Annual*.⁴

Also in the category of newly packaged original work by Merton is *Beholding Paradise: The Photographs of Thomas Merton*,⁵ an elegant volume with four chapters of photographs by Merton and one devoted to photos of Merton. The book's thoughtful layout facilitates progressive reading: photos of places, objects and persons are grouped in such a manner that Merton's eye for the outer and the inner dimensions of "paradise" are showcased. Illustrating photographer Robert Adams' declaration that if "a photograph is to move us, it must arise out of authentic human experience,"⁶ the collective effect of Pearson's edition is a stirring, inclusive vision finalized by the last chapter in which the camera has been turned on the photographer, the seer now seen. This exhibit of Merton's non-verbal contemplative genius is enhanced by Paul Pearson's informative narrative, which draws upon his well-established acquaintance with Merton's life and writing. This book invites a reflective approach, or as reviewer Bonnie Thurston notes, it is "a book for lingering in."⁷ For additional commentary, see Patrick Mahon's review in this volume of *The Merton Annual*.

Under the broad category of secondary Merton-related publications are a number of books that focus on Merton exclusively or study him in connection with other high-profile persons with whom Merton shares some evident or perceived kinship. First is Fintan Monahan's compact volume entitled *Peace Smiles: Rediscovering Thomas Merton*,⁸ which takes its title from a passage in *The Sign of Jonas*⁹ in which Merton describes the effect of his love for monastic solitude: "delight begins to overpower me from head to foot and peace smiles even in the marrow of my bones" (15). As noted in the foreword, Bishop Monahan "explores Merton as artist, social critic and ecumenist" in a book geared toward a general reader perhaps not schooled in the basics of Merton's "fascinating" life (9). The book satisfactorily achieves its author's established goal of conveying how Merton's writing extends hope to others seeking the authentic and truthful life.

4. See also Robert G. Toth, "Merton's Words on the Word of God," *The Merton Seasonal* 45.4 (Winter 2020) 25-26.

5. *Beholding Paradise: The Photographs of Thomas Merton*, edited by Paul M. Pearson (New York: Paulist, 2020).

6. Quoted in Douglas E. Christie, *The Blue Sapphire of the Mind: Notes for a Contemplative Ecology* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013) (audio version).

7. Bonnie Thurston, "This Spiritual Light – This Vision," *The Merton Seasonal* 46.2 (Summer 2021) 36-37.

8. Fintan Monahan, *Peace Smiles: Rediscovering Thomas Merton* (Dublin: Veritas, 2020).

9. Thomas Merton, *The Sign of Jonas* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1953) 281.

With a purpose both academic and instrumental, *Authenticity, Passion, and Advocacy: Approaching Adolescent Spirituality from the Life and Wisdom of Thomas Merton*,¹⁰ Thomas E. Malewitz combines his veteran's experience as educator, scholar, parent and reader of the life and writings of Thomas Merton to design a comprehensive curriculum for developing and nurturing adolescent spirituality. Having identified authenticity, passion and advocacy as three essential elements for the effectiveness of such an effort, Malewitz points to Merton's biography and body of work – including ample detailing of his correspondence with young people – to give examples of those three concepts in action. In focused discussions arranged under succinct headings (e.g., “Education,” “Athletics,” “Bullying”), the author reinforces the wisdom gained from his professional experience with what he has learned from Merton – particularly about awakening the True Self – and lays out a methodical, persuasive approach to spiritual leadership geared toward adolescents. To any who may question the status of Merton's relevance to the lives of today's young people, this book offers one affirmative response. For a more extensive assessment of Malewitz's book, see the review by Tony Caldwell in this volume.¹¹

Capping off this section of the survey of books focused entirely on Merton is the work of eminent scholar Bonnie Thurston, *Shaped by the End You Live For: Thomas Merton's Monastic Spirituality*.¹² With a title that calls to mind the passage from Merton's novel *My Argument with the Gestapo* in which the narrator asks: “If you want to identify me, ask me not where I live, or what I like to eat, or how I comb my hair, but ask me what I think I am living for”¹³ (160-61), Thurston introduces a rendition of the quest motif, not for treasure or glory, but for purpose and from that discovery, identity. Thurston invokes the variously worded question found in John's Gospel, “What are you looking for?” (1:38), and pairs it with the guiding monastic principle that states Christ is the source and the end of a monk's life, to build an analysis of Merton's monastic spirituality upon the complexities of his answer to the aforementioned question, distilling its essence with economical clarity. Careful to point out that while the book is not a biography of Merton but a study of his spiritual vision that

10. Thomas Malewitz, *Authenticity, Passion, and Advocacy: Approaching Adolescent Spirituality from the Life and Wisdom of Thomas Merton* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2020).

11. See also Jeffrey T. Kiernan, “A Mertonian Lens on Teen Life,” *The Merton Seasonal* 45.4 (Winter 2020) 30-32.

12. Bonnie Thurston, *Shaped by the End You Live For: Thomas Merton's Monastic Spirituality* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2020).

13. Thomas Merton, *My Argument with the Gestapo: A Macaronic Journal* (New York: Doubleday, 1969) 160-61.

fueled his growth within and beyond the monastery, Thurston incorporates specific events from Merton's life, which she then interprets as formative experiences in the progression of his Christ-centered identity. In the reviews section, one can find Bernadette McNary-Zak's more in-depth discussion of this book.¹⁴

The 2020 bibliography also contains several rewarding books that, while not centering solely on Thomas Merton, tell of his significance within the spheres of other figures who have left an indelible footprint on the consciousness of many Merton followers and admirers. Three of those books concern Merton and Dorothy Day. First is Julie Leininger Pycior's *Dorothy Day, Thomas Merton, and the Greatest Commandment: Radical Love in Times of Crisis*.¹⁵ The book begins with a thought-provoking foreword by Merton scholar and former Archbishop of Canterbury Rowan Williams, who extols Pycior's work as an offering of epiphanies for today's "profoundly diseased" society (ix). Through eight chapters, augmented by illustrative inserts, endnotes and a bibliography, Pycior weaves her personal experiences and reflections into a study of the intersecting faith journeys of Day and Merton. Pycior focuses tightly on the common embrace of "radical love" in their responses to the distressing times in which they lived. The author presents that love as their tandem bequest to today's troubled society. In a Coda titled "The Final Word Is Love," Pycior concludes: "If Thomas Merton reveals to us the meditative – the mystical even – alive in our wounded world, Dorothy Day reminds us that our loving actions signify in mysterious ways beyond all telling. We do things 'by little and little,' and God does the rest" (163). Patrick F. O'Connell's thorough assessment of Pycior's book can be found in the reviews section of this volume.¹⁶

A book devoted exclusively to the venerated Christian peace activist and leader of the Catholic Worker movement (a book in which Merton is discussed peripherally) is *Dorothy Day: Dissenting Voice of the American Century* by John Loughery and Blythe Randolph,¹⁷ an excellent account of Day's life from childhood to death. Among the work's many attractive aspects is the attention given to Day's reading habits and preferences, in which Thomas Merton apparently had an influential role. For instance,

14. See also Pauline A. Viviano, "In My Ending Is My Meaning," *The Merton Seasonal* 45.3 (Fall 2020) 27-29.

15. Julie Leininger Pycior, *Dorothy Day, Thomas Merton, and the Greatest Commandment: Radical Love in Times of Crisis* (New York: Paulist, 2020).

16. See also Paul Pynkoski, "An Apostolate of Friendship," *The Merton Seasonal* 46.3 (Fall 2021) 32-34.

17. John Loughery and Blythe Randolph, *Dorothy Day: Dissenting Voice of the American Century* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2020).

the authors comment that Day's reading of *The Seven Storey Mountain* "touched chords in Dorothy: how much [she and Merton] had in common as they stumbled their way toward faith" (281). Illustrating the mutual respect that existed between the two famous Catholics, the authors quote Merton's letter to Day, where, in typical hyperbolic fashion, he declares: "If there were no Catholic Worker and such forms of witness, I would never have joined the Catholic Church" (281).

Merton also plays a significant supporting role in *Writing Straight with Crooked Lines*,¹⁸ the memoir of Jim Forest, sometime associate of Dorothy Day, as well as friend and biographer of Thomas Merton.¹⁹ In *The Art of Memoir*,²⁰ in a chapter called "Why Memoirs Fail," Mary Karr singles out *voice* (181) as the major vital aspect of any good memoir and specifies some of the myriad ways that a memoirist can vocally fall short of the Goldilocks award: too shrill, too cool, too untrustworthy, etc. (181). In *Writing Straight with Crooked Lines*, Jim Forest does not miss the mark. With the effective handling of a practiced biographer, he reports experiences from his phenomenal life of courage, commitment and human frailty with a voice emanating honesty, humor and understanding, in an offering of details neither too sparing nor too sharing. Approximately fifty of the book's 326 pages are about Thomas Merton's formative impact on Forest, "the young activist," so named by Merton in his poignant 1962 letter of counsel during the stressful days of Forest's involvement in anti-war protest.²¹ For additional analysis, see the review by Michael N. McGregor.²²

Two of the year's books portray Merton within a gallery of individuals who share a common trait. First, in *Mavericks, Mystics, and Misfits: Americans against the Grain*,²³ in a chapter titled "Thomas Merton: The Restless Hermit (January 31, 1915–December 10, 1968)," Arthur Hoyle depicts Merton as one of a collection of "exemplary American men and women whose lives collectively . . . exhibit certain enduring qualities of

18. Jim Forest, *Writing Straight with Crooked Lines: A Memoir* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2020).

19. See Jim Forest, *Living with Wisdom: A Life of Thomas Merton* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1991).

20. Mary Karr, *The Art of Memoir* (New York: HarperCollins, 2015).

21. See Thomas Merton, *The Hidden Ground of Love: Letters on Religious Experience and Social Concerns*, ed. William H. Shannon (New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 1985) 264-65.

22. See also Gordon Oyer, "The Crooked Made Straight," *The Merton Seasonal* 45.3 (Fall 2020) 30-32.

23. Arthur Hoyle, "Thomas Merton: The Restless Hermit (January 31, 1915–December 10, 1968)," *Mavericks, Mystics, and Misfits: Americans against the Grain* (Mechanicsburg, PA: Sunbury Press, 2020) 167-97.

the American character that persist despite the changing circumstances of time and place” (1). The one enduring quality, which, in Hoyle’s view, unifies this diverse group is the “tension inherent in the American character” (8) between the interests of the individual and those of society, a tension which leads to dissent. Hoyle situates Merton among this group of non-conformists and (despite some minor factual errors) gives a birth-to-death biographical sketch of Merton in order to show him as “a man of contradictory and passionate character, pulled between his longing for the solitary experience of God and his love for the world and its people” (167).

Similar to Hoyle’s approach, Bruce G. Epperly, in *Mystics in Action: Twelve Saints for Today*,²⁴ assembles a group of spiritual “North Stars,” each a “mystic” with special gifts for contemporary wanderers. In “Contemplation and Compassion: Thomas Merton,” Epperly upholds Merton as an example of how geographical stability and solitude can broaden one’s spiritual connection to others. Epperly ends each sketch with key takeaways from the life story under consideration and suggested points for reflection: extrapolating from Merton’s case, the author highlights the importance of contemplative reading in promoting growth toward saintliness. Further, by sharing similarities between his own life experiences and those whose lives he extols, Epperly effectively invites the reader to do the same.

Finally, in this section on books which consider Thomas Merton in a wider context than that of an exclusive study is Chad Thralls’ *Deep Calls to Deep: Mysticism, Scripture, and Contemplation*.²⁵ Based on the underlying assertion that the primary purpose of religion is to move closer to God, Thralls argues for anchoring mysticism at the center of any religious practice. Thralls uses the work of Merton and other contemplatives to demonstrate the efficacy of mysticism in fulfilling that ultimate purpose. In a section titled “A Contemplative Anthropology,” Thralls amply quotes such works as *New Seeds of Contemplation* and *The New Man*, as he applies Merton’s metaphor of the False and the True Self to an explanation of how mystical prayer is a means of compassionately letting go of the fabricated self, so that the soul can rediscover its original divine unity.

Comprising a sub-category of one is the book *Advancing Nonviolence and Just Peace in the Church and the World*, edited by Rose Marie Berger, Ken Buttigan, Judy Coode and Marie Dennis,²⁶ described in a

24. Bruce G. Epperly, “Contemplation and Compassion: Thomas Merton,” *Mystics in Action: Twelve Saints for Today* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2020) 167-97.

25. Chad Thralls, *Deep Calls to Deep: Mysticism, Scripture, and Contemplation* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2020).

26. The Catholic Non-Violence Initiative, *Advancing Nonviolence and Just Peace*

back-cover blurb as “the first of a global participatory process facilitated from 2017-2018 by the Catholic Non-Violence Initiative (CNI), a project of Pax Christi International, to deepen Catholic understanding of and commitment to Gospel nonviolence.” The work of many contributors, it is a thoughtfully structured resource that combines biblical, theological, ethical, pastoral and strategic materials into a compelling guide to peace and justice work for today’s Catholic Church, within and beyond the institution. Although the book is not by or about Thomas Merton *per se*, its subject matter is a recognizable core issue in his life and work. Moreover, readers of *The Merton Annual* may find the book of particular interest because two of its editors, Berger and Dennis, were well-received plenary speakers at the two most recent ITMS general meetings. A review by John Sniogocki of the book’s features can be found in this volume.

Periodical Articles

Merton studies in 2020 were enriched by publications of numerous noteworthy articles in both scholarly and popular periodicals. The following précis of selected items, organized according to theme, intends only to convey a sense of the breadth and richness of the year’s bounty.

“The Bomb(s) This Time: An Invitation to Peace – A Meditation on Thomas Merton’s *Cold War Letters*”²⁷ by Tim Vivian is an impassioned and reasoned reflection on Thomas Merton’s collection of correspondence on the state of the world in the early 1960s.²⁸ By citing it along with other of Merton’s mid-twentieth century writings on society’s pernicious ills, Vivian integrates Merton’s faithful witness to peace and justice into his own and concludes by inviting readers to do so as well. Immediately following is a companion piece, “Cold War Letters to Our Cruel World,”²⁹ in which Gary Commins also writes forcefully of the prophetic power of the letters that Merton mimeographed in 1961 for distribution among friends in order to share his views on the destructive effects of militarism without technically violating censoring directives from his superiors. Commins, like Vivian an Episcopal priest, quotes liberally from the letters as he applies Merton’s incisive critique of six decades ago to our country’s current social, political and religious tensions, joining Vivian in concluding that

in the Church and the World, edited by Rose Marie Berger, Ken Buttigan, Judy Coode and Marie Dennis (Brussels, Belgium: Pax Christi International, 2020).

27. Tim Vivian, “The Bomb(s) This Time: An Invitation to Peace – A Meditation on Thomas Merton’s *Cold War Letters*,” *Cistercian Studies Quarterly* 55.1 (2020) 19-54.

28. Thomas Merton, *Cold War Letters*, ed. Christine M. Bochen and William H. Shannon (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2006).

29. Gary Commins, “Cold War Letters to Our Cruel World,” *Cistercian Studies Quarterly* 55.1 (2020): 55-76.

we “would do well to heed” Merton’s edifying words today.

While not in the genre of personal reflection, but along similar lines, “*De Consideratione: A Monastic Form of Non-violence*” by Bernadette McNary-Zak³⁰ analyzes Merton’s 1964 monastic conference, “Some Points from the Birmingham Nonviolence Movement,” and suggests that Merton views the Birmingham protesters’ commitment to non-violent resistance as essentially “a religious act” (1) and by doing so, he establishes grounds for “a mutual relationship between the monastery and the world” (4). McNary-Zak infers a connection between Merton’s 1964 “Points” and Bernard of Clairvaux’s twelfth-century work *De Consideratione* and asserts that with this conference, Merton, in the manner of St. Bernard, attempts to cultivate in his novices an awareness of the implications for Christian engagement in the “changing realities” (6) of contemporary society then and presumably now.

In “Journeying with Psyche and Soul in Spirituality,”³¹ the text of a lecture on the maturation of the psyche from egocentrism to unity, psychiatrist and Merton scholar Larry Culliford incorporates Merton’s ideas, particularly his theology of the True/False self, as well as his writings on silent prayer and meditation, into a psychology-based resource for counseling those in search of authentic interior growth.

In a different handling of Merton’s thoughts on delusional self-identification, “Guilt and Grace: Thomas Merton’s American Identity,”³² David Golemboski masterfully deconstructs prevailing revisionist myths about American identity and history as a platform for analysis of Merton’s interpretation of what it means to be an American. Drawing largely from *Conjectures of a Guilty Bystander*, Golemboski illustrates Merton’s rejection of the corrosive concepts of nationalism and exceptionalism as well as his insistence on a non-binary view of an American identity that embraces the whole of the Americas.

An intriguing discussion of the subject of Merton and inner development is Peter Ellis’s article, “Oakham, Oakham!”³³ Arguing for more attention to the significance of Merton’s time as a schoolboy at Ripley Court and Oakham, Ellis depicts the traditional boarding school environment as a breeding ground for the False Self. Ellis sees Merton’s

30. Bernadette McNary-Zak, “*De Consideratione: A Monastic Form of Non-violence*,” *The Merton Journal* 27.1 (Eastertide 2020) 3-12.

31. Larry Culliford, “Journeying with Psyche and Soul in Spirituality.” *Spirituality Studies* 6.1 (Spring 2020) 2-15; available at: <https://www.spirituality-studies.org/dp-volume6-issue1-spring2020/2>.

32. David Golemboski, “Guilt and Grace: Thomas Merton’s American Identity,” *The Merton Journal* 27.1 (Eastertide 2020) 18-28.

33. Peter Ellis, “Oakham! Oakham!” *The Merton Journal* 27.2 (Advent 2020) 59-68.

desire for the enclosed conditions of the monastic community as a way of “reversing,” via his contemplative vocation, the disordering effects wrought by the “absurd and maddening” experiences of his time in what Ellis (himself a longtime “boarder”) views as the typical conditions of the British boarding school.

Several articles of 2020 point to Merton’s inexhaustible belief in humanity’s sacred unity in poignant *ad rem* analyses for a world mired in hostilities among and within religious communities. In “‘The Mystical Fire of Christ’s Charity’: Thomas Merton, the Eucharist, and the Meaning of Dialogue,”³⁴ Gregory Hillis first recalls how Pope Francis, in his 2015 address to the U.S. Congress, highlighted Thomas Merton as a person of dialogue. From there, Hillis claims that, despite the suspicions with which some authorities within the Catholic Church may view Merton’s openness to exploring the religious traditions of others, “far from compromising him as a Roman Catholic,” his “emphasis on dialogue” is “actually rooted in Eucharistic theology and is, in fact, the natural concomitant of his understanding of the implications of the Eucharist” (78). Referring often to such works as *The New Man* and *The Living Bread*, Hillis argues eloquently that rather than pulling him away from his Catholic identity, Merton’s bent for dialogue became a powerful outgrowth of his sacramental practice.

William Apel’s “Thomas Merton and the *Gita*: A Testament to Freedom and Transcendence”³⁵ is an additional illustration of how Merton’s enthusiasm for inter-faith understanding is rooted in his Christianity. Apel asserts that reading the *Bhagavad-Gita* strengthened Merton’s understanding of the limitations of “Western egocentrism” as it also reinforced his belief in the liberating message of the Gospels. Quoting *The Asian Journal*, Apel emphasizes Merton’s recognition of a profound connection between the two sacred texts, in that both teach us “to live in awareness of an inner truth that exceeds the grasp of our thought” (9).

In “Thomas Merton & Christian de Chergé: A Shared Interfaith Vision,”³⁶ Stephen Dunhill gives an informative perspective on Merton’s openness to dialogue with other faith traditions as he compares the inter-religious outreach efforts of Merton with those of his fellow Trappist, Christian de Chergé, superior of the monastery of Our Lady of Atlas in Algeria, one of seven monks murdered in 1996, when they chose to

34. Gregory K. Hillis, “‘The Mystical Fire of Christ’s Charity’: Thomas Merton, the Eucharist, and the Meaning of Dialogue,” *Cistercian Studies Quarterly* 55.1 (2020) 77-95.

35. William Apel, “Thomas Merton and the *Gita*: A Testament to Freedom and Transcendence,” *The Merton Journal* 27.2 (Advent 2020) 3-10.

36. Stephen Dunhill, “Thomas Merton & Christian de Chergé: A Shared Interfaith Vision,” *The Merton Journal* 27.1 (Eastertide 2020) 32-46.

remain in the area after having been alerted to a terrorist threat (the subject of the 2010 film *Of Gods and Men*). Dunhill concludes that, while not without some overt differences, both monks portray an exemplary grasp of the serious need for and challenges of communication between Christians and Muslims.

As in the past, writers of Merton-related articles in 2020 had plenty of topical applications for Merton's stimulating and prescient words on racism. Peter Feuerherd, in "Thomas Merton's Writings on Race Resonate, Gain Renewed Attention in 2020,"³⁷ quotes from Merton's works and cites both established and rising Merton scholars to report on how in the midst of a year in which lethal acts of moral indifference visited upon people of color were horrifyingly prominent, Thomas Merton's voice then and now offers healing wisdom for reckoning with the persistent atrocity of racism.³⁸

In a similar topical article, Farai Mapamula, in "Black Lives Matter – Why Now?"³⁹ joins other spiritual leaders, who, amid racial crises, find renewed plangency in Merton's essay "Letters to a White Liberal."⁴⁰ Mapamula, a minister in the Methodist Church, echoes Merton's appeals to the human family to recognize this *kairos* hour and allow its revelations to "propel us into witness and solidarity" (54).

Amid the backdrop of a year in which binary thinking worsened the existing hostilities among people of different beliefs, a couple of remarkable articles appeared offering fresh perspectives on Merton and the relationship between faith and reason. First, "A Canterbury Tale: Thomas Merton and St. Anselm" by Patrick F. O'Connell⁴¹ examines

37. Peter Feuerherd, "Thomas Merton's Writings on Race Resonate, Gain Renewed Attention in 2020," *National Catholic Reporter* 57.7 (8-21 January 2021); available at: <https://www.ncronline.org/news/people/thomas-mertons-writings-race-resonate-gain-renewed-attention-2020>.

38. Although not mentioned specifically in the article, 2020 was also the year in which, inspired by the writings of Thomas Merton, the ITMS released "The Struggle for Racial Justice in the United States: A Statement of Commitment from the International Thomas Merton Society" and launched its "Tuesdays with Merton" webinar series with the presentation, "Thomas Merton & Black Lives Matter: Spirituality and Racial Justice for Our Times," by Daniel P. Horan, OFM. For access to the statement and links to the "Tuesdays with Merton" series, see the Thomas Merton Center/International Thomas Merton Society website: <http://www.merton.org>.

39. Farai Mapamula, "Black Lives Matter – Why Now?" *The Merton Journal* 27.2 (Advent 2020) 49-54.

40. Thomas Merton. "The Black Revolution: Letters to a White Liberal," *Seeds of Destruction* (New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 1964) 3-71.

41. Patrick F. O'Connell, "A Canterbury Tale: Thomas Merton and St. Anselm," *Cithara* 59.2 (May 2020) 48-67.

heretofore-not-widely-available evidence of Thomas Merton's interest in the eleventh-century monk and theologian Anselm of Canterbury, whose "integrated personality" (51) Merton found captivating. O'Connell illustrates the depth of Merton's attraction to Anselm by looking at it from three perspectives: Anselm as person, monk and theologian. With multiple references to the texts of Merton's novitiate conferences on Anselm, O'Connell demonstrates how Merton's strong affinity for Anselm derives largely from his recognition that Anselm's "monasticism was intrinsic to his theology and his theology intrinsic to his monasticism" (57) and a shared understanding, despite rehearsals of the "ontological argument" for the existence of God attributed to Anselm, that while the development of faith does not preclude the role of reason, the journey *begins* with faith.

In another treatment of the same topic, "Faith and Reason in Thomas Merton: The 'Unified Heart' – A Monk's Solution?," Liana Gehl⁴² asserts that Merton offers a different outlook from the reductive view that the two faculties of faith and reason are irreconcilably opposed. Gehl, a linguist and theologian with an interest in Thomas Merton and Vladimir Ghika,⁴³ refers to biographical accounts of Merton's life as well as his letters and journals to demonstrate how the "unified heart" of Thomas Merton rose on the "two wings of faith and reason" (deftly employing an image from John Paul II's 1988 encyclical *Fides et Ratio*).

A handful of powerful articles of 2020 once again bring Merton into a chorus of voices proclaiming "the fierce urgency of now" as the time to fully acknowledge the accelerating destruction of our planet and to seek the guidance of Merton in deepening our ecological consciousness through contemplative awareness of the intricate connectivity of all creation. Karl Möller, in "A Precious Gift: Caring for Our Common Home,"⁴⁴ points to how Merton's "immersion in the scriptures and the daily chanting of the Psalms" (26) renewed his sensory awareness of his relationship with the natural world, a practice available to almost anyone. Gordon Oyer, in "Contemplation as Connection: Fruitful Action on an Unraveling Planet,"⁴⁵ offers both scholarly and reflective discourse on the issue. After summarizing the work of recent Catholic theologians on the interdependency of all species and our supporting biosphere, Oyer

42. Liana Gehl, "Faith and Reason in Thomas Merton: The 'Unified Heart' – A Monk's Solution?" *Theologia Catholica* 65.1-2 (January-December 2020) 91-106.

43. See Liana Gehl, "The Invisible Order of Grace: Ponderings on the Lives of Thomas Merton and Vladimir Ghika," *The Merton Annual* 33 (2020) 169-91.

44. Karl Möller, "A Precious Gift: Caring for Our Common Home," *The Merton Journal* 27.2 (Advent 2020) 18-28.

45. Gordon Oyer, "Contemplation as Connection: Fruitful Action on an Unraveling Planet," *The Merton Journal* 27.1 (Eastertide 2020) 49-60.

demonstrates how Merton's contemplative writings of more than fifty years ago anticipate contemporary iterations of those connections. He goes on to assert that Merton is also a resource for finding the balance between contemplation and action, essential for any productive response to that spiritual awareness.

Not surprisingly, 2020, a year of shut-down and quarantine, produced a handful of Merton-inspired meditations on the subject of involuntary isolation. Particularly memorable is Kenneth Carveley's "Together – Apart."⁴⁶ After quoting and examining poignant accounts from Merton's autobiography of various experiences of separation from his brother, John Paul, Carveley contemplates the paradox of finding opportunities for unity in forced separation, such as that brought on by "social distancing" protocols.

In conclusion, the yield of books and articles by and about Thomas Merton brought to light in a year of historic darkness and surveyed in this thirty-fourth volume of *The Merton Annual* demonstrates yet again that sounding the depths of Merton's significance to the holy ground of the present moment – however far removed from his lifetime that moment may be or however novel its challenges – remains a fulfilling and generative endeavor.

46. Kenneth Carveley, "Together – Apart," *The Merton Journal* 27.2 (Advent 2020) 29-31.