

of the painting by Jamini Roy of the “Oriental Christ,” purchased in Calcutta, that Merton and Amiya Chakravarty offered to Redwoods as a gift.⁵⁾ These photographs brought back many a generous memory for me of days spent trekking in the area.

There can be little doubt that David Odorisio has done his research well and wisely, and in the process filled in a sizeable gap in Merton studies concerning the final few months of Merton’s life. Long awaited, this publication has been worth this lengthy wait. The fact that such Merton worthies as Jonathan Montaldo, Bonnie Thurston, Patrick O’Connell, David Steindl-Rast, Monica Weis, Paul Pearson, Cyprian Consiglio and Christine Bochen have endorsed the book and given it their appreciative recognition does need to be noted and not overlooked. I must admit I wish these conferences had been transcribed when I was at Redwoods in 2015, but the pure gold that David has mined is still worth its weight.

For those who are more systematic in their thinking, who ask of a writer-thinker that ideas be parsed in a careful, detailed and scholarly manner, it should be noted that the informal, interactive process reflected in this material is not intended to provide such analysis. For those who prefer a more creative, suggestive and speculative literary approach, like Dante’s Virgil reaching out his arms to the further shore, *Thomas Merton in California* is a meditative must-read, consistent with so much of his work, reflective of his ever-deeper dives for varied well-formed pearls of insight, wisdom and love, integration and a comprehensive approach to the pilgrimage of faith. *La Lotta Continua*.

Ron Dart

RAGGIO, Marcela, editor, *Diálogos, Puentes, Encuentros: La Vigencia de Thomas Merton [Dialogues, Bridges, Encounters: The Enduring Relevance of Thomas Merton]* (Mendoza, Argentina: Facultad de Filosofía y Letras de la Universidad Nacional de Cuyo, 2024), pp. 171. ISBN 978-950-774-426-6 (available online at: https://bdigital.uncu.edu.ar/objetos_digitales/20129/raggio-vigenciadethomasmerton.pdf).

August 28-29 2025 marked The Fourth Argentine Thomas Merton Conference, which I attended virtually from my office at the Bellarmine Merton Center. I witnessed how what had begun as a small, local conference focused on Merton has grown both in number of participants and in its global reach. The collection reviewed here publishes essays

5. See Amiya Chakravarty, “Epilogue,” in Donald Grayston and Michael W. Higgins, eds., *Thomas Merton: Pilgrim in Process* (Toronto: Griffin House, 1983) 171-73, and *AJ* 32-33, 46-47, 70-71.

in English and Spanish from the second conference, held in 2021, made available online three years later. The inaugural conference, in 2018, was a local affair, held at Cuyo National University in Mendoza, Argentina. By 2021, it reflected the post-COVID reality by hosting a hybrid virtual conference that opened to a global array of participants representing three languages and speakers spanning six countries. By the recent fourth conference, the speakers represented nine countries and added the continent of Africa to Europe, North and South America.

Papers published from the second conference testify to Merton's role as a bridge-builder of dialogue between people of his time and our own. This is not only demonstrated through the global makeup of the conference, but in the topics chosen, which represent the theme of dialogue and engagement, expressed in diverse ways: mysticism, Zen photography, solitude and love, poetry, communication across cultures, and epistolatory exchanges with friends near and far.

Before discussing the particular sections, it is useful to note that the volume is a partially bilingual text, having essays in either Spanish or English or both. Editor Marcela Raggio decided to allow contributors to submit translations made by the contributors themselves but otherwise to omit supplying a translation. There are five essays only in English, one only in Spanish, two English-Spanish parallel translations, and parallel text for the editor's Foreword ("Palabras preliminares").

The editor divides the book into two sections. The essays in the first section are grouped under the themes of mysticism and its artistic and interfaith expressions. Taken together, they constitute an expansive spiritual hub. In considering the larger bridge-building theme of the book, the essays emanating from this hub are like spokes of a wheel, Merton building bridges in many directions on a global scale from his rooted center at the monastery. The fruits of the bridge-building, from spiritual core to engagement of the world, manifest in the human encounters described in the second section.

The first section begins with Paul Pearson's contribution of an essay on Merton's Zen photography, describing Merton's use of his camera as a contemplative instrument that allowed the monk a Zen way of being in the present and seeing things as they are. Merton's maturity as a Christian contemplative allows his use of a Zen practice applied in an aesthetic realm, aiding his own prayer and meditation. In the following essay, "The Abyss of Solitude and the 'Social Maturing of Love,'" presented in English and Spanish, Fernando Beltrán Llavador describes how Merton's "Notes for a Philosophy of Solitude" functioned as an identity statement (emphasizing both intentional marginality and rejec-

tion of unjust social systems) while also serving as a roadmap for more positive engagement – solitude to achieve the peace that makes it possible to commune with God and with others in a renewed fashion. Thus, it is the spiritual underpinning of the engagement to be described in the second section of the book. Michael Woodward shares a close reading of two of Merton's poems, "Grace's House" and "For My Brother: Reported Missing in Action, 1943"; beyond a revealing unpacking of the symbolism of these highly personal poems, the essay serves to show how engagement of the heart is important to unlocking spiritual truths Merton would use to transcend the division of eastern and western thought and to critique war. Like the art of photography in the first essay, Merton uses a different art form, poetry, to reveal spiritual truths not easily revealed in prose. Continuing the theme of bridging east and west, Tzu Ying Lee contributes a Spanish essay on the concept of Tao in *The Way of Chuang Tzu*. Like Woodward's essay on poetry, Tzu Ying Lee provides insightful commentary on Merton's renderings of Chuang Tzu, showing how Merton could capture lively interpretations of a Chinese language he did not read because of his attunement to a meditative life in nature. Again, Merton's spiritual rootedness not only helped him bridge a cultural divide but gave us insights into the mind of a thinker from centuries in the past through the lens of a twentieth-century monk.

The second section of the book shifts to the way Merton's mystical outlook manifests itself in his engagements with others. I was surprised when first hearing David Golemboski present on "Merton and the New Integralism" in 2021, as he describes the integralist vision of bringing back a state governed by an insular Catholic state religion, a stark contrast to Merton's catholicity in dialogue with other faiths, with different confessions of Christians, and with the secular world. Given the increased rise of prominent proponents of Christian nationalism in the United States, my reading of the essay again in 2025 underlined how prescient it was, and its relevance is only increasing. Golemboski connects aspects of Merton's social critique of the late 1950s and 1960s to demonstrate how Merton might respond to integralists today. Not recounting all arguments against integralism, Golemboski highlights a distinct perspective Merton could bring as post-conciliar Catholic, rather than the usual stated opponent of the integralist, the secular liberal. Continuing a theme of expansive and engaged catholicity, the present reviewer discusses the way Merton's correspondence with Victoria Ocampo was an opening to dialogue with global intellectuals. There is something appropriately mirrored about Merton's experience of engagement after his Fourth and Walnut epiphany commencing with

the Argentinian Ocampo, published in a book with a theme about Merton's global bridge-building emanating from an Argentine conference. The bilingual essay by María Barrera-Agarwal that follows traces the Latin American roots of Merton's prose poem *Hagia Sophia*, especially through connections with two Ecuadorians, the artist Jaime Andrade Moscoso and the poet Jorge Carrera Andrade. I feel one should read this essay of the "Madre de América" before reading the essay on Ocampo because it seems somewhat like the book in microcosm, a spiritual awakening through Sophianism discovered in Merton's encounter with the art and literature of South America that led to real-world connections and dialogue. Even those who are already familiar with Merton's poem or the work of Merton scholars like Christopher Pramuk in analyzing it, might be surprised how closely the language Merton uses to describe his Ecuadorian encounters (through Jaime Andrade's art, Carrera Andrade's poetry, and Merton's own reading about the country and culture) mirrors the poetic verse of *Hagia Sophia*.

In bringing the book to its conclusion, Brother Paul Quenon and Judith Valente discuss how Merton's "Apostolate of Friendship" influenced their dialogue and has inspired others. Like the essay by Golemboski, the Quenon–Valente dialogue brings Merton to the present, but in very personal terms rather than the political sphere. Their essay starts by relating Merton's mastery in meeting people where they are, from New York artists to high school students to peace activists. It reveals Merton's fine sense of humor and that Merton cared deeply about people, not just instrumentally, due to an interest in an idea or a cause, but with the attention of a personalist. Brother Paul brings to the encounter the experience of having been a novice under Merton and inspired by him but also as one who has had many more years granted to him as a monk than Merton was given. Valente's gift in the encounter, having lived an active working life, is as a partner in the dialogue who has experiences to which more readers can relate. Their interaction is playful and insightful. The noted personalism ends the volume with a humanness that seems characteristic of Merton, while the contemporary nature of the dialogue underlines the *vigencia*, the enduring relevance and force of truth, that the book recognizes in the legacy of Merton.

Though the book covers quite a diversity of topics, it holds together thematically, as do its two sections. As someone who attended and presented at the conference that played original host to these papers, it was a valuable return to this sharing across languages, countries and continents. It could be equally valuable to someone who was not there, and readers can find it online for free. It may be an inducement to anticipate

a Fifth Argentine Thomas Merton Conference where the circle will be even wider, but Merton will still be at the center, holding it all together.

Mark C. Meade

QUENON, Paul, OCSO, *A Matter of the Heart: A Monk's Journal, 1970-2022*, Foreword by Fenton Johnson, Afterword by James Finley (Rhinebeck, NY: MonKFISH, 2024), pp. xiv + 149. ISBN: 978-1-958972-41-0 (paper) \$23.99.

In his afterword to Brother Paul Quenon's latest book, James Finley recommends sitting in a quiet place and reading it as an exercise in *lectio divina*, which Finley describes as “a way of reading that embodies intimate intimations of God personally speaking to you in the words being read.” What you’re looking for, he says, are “phrases and insights that strike you as beautiful,” those that “provide insights into aspects of God’s oneness with you in the gift and miracle of your day-to-day life” (142). Finley’s recommendation is the perfect approach to a collection of journal entries that Quenon tells us are not in chronological order except in being grouped by decades. This structural choice might be frustrating to readers looking for a clear through line. But if you’re able to free yourself from the need to find connections between the seemingly random thoughts and insights here, the book becomes something like the night full of stars Quenon writes about: stimulating lights of various magnitudes stirring us in the stillness of our own searching lives.

Unlike Thomas Merton, under whom he was a novice at Gethsemani, Quenon admits to not being an “avid journaler” (xiv). He says he only began to journal because Merton told his novices doing so was a good idea. With Merton, you can follow any number of threads from entry to entry, reading them like an autobiography or even a novel. Quenon, on the other hand, writes more like the poet he is, exploring an idea or an image and then letting it go after a paragraph, or at most, a couple of pages. In fact, from time to time he inserts his poems, such as one called “Untimely Elegy for Thomas Merton” that includes these lines:

Now is when I'll write it down and say –
say this:

he always said he was nothing, or wanted to be,
so, there's nothing to complain about
if nothing's left of Thomas Merton.
Nothing was there to begin with. (36)

Being nothing and wanting nothing other than connection to God is a