

# Finding the Thomas Merton Bibliographies: Identifying the Source Documents

by John E. King

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It is impossible to respond to any “prophetic challenge” if you are not aware of the content. Finding Merton’s “prophetic challenge” is somewhat difficult since the entirety of the Merton canon is so very large and is, to some extent, hard to find.

This paper will help the student of Merton to identify a number of sources by which to codify the Merton writings. Since Merton’s canon is so large, a systematic process is necessary in order to put together a structure for understanding the totality of his writings. This article focuses on one major area: *identifying the Merton bibliographies*. This document will identify the major bibliographies as well as their strengths and weaknesses; it will also suggest issues for further study in the bibliographic arena.

Two other correlated problems are not covered by the article:

(1) *Finding or accessing Merton works*. Serious Merton students need a set of helpful techniques for finding the actual volumes of Merton in their varied formats.

(2) *Identifying the various categories of the Merton canon*. Examples of materials from each of the categories need to be identified, as well as from the subcategories; a checklist of the categories and a checklist of books and pamphlets by and about Merton need to be designed.

The goal of this paper is thus to help the serious student of Merton to have more precise knowledge to find the “prophetic challenge,” knowing where to look as well as identifying real “limited editions” and describing many of the elusive Merton items serious students have difficulty locating.

One of the classic models of finding someone’s “Works” is to consult a comprehensive bibliography. This allows us to identify the sources of the “Works” and the resources we need to locate physically the identified source.

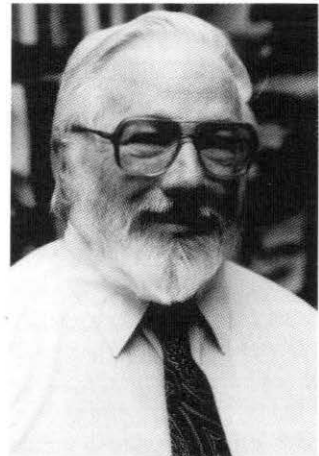
## Identifying the Merton Bibliographies: A Current Survey

### *Introduction*

How do you actually answer the question, “How many books did Thomas Merton write?” A most accurate answer might well be—

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“It depends.” It depends on how you count the various works that were produced by the phenomenal author/monk of Gethsemani. It depends on whether you count translations. It depends on the categories you use to organize the Merton canon. It depends on whether you count limited editions, volumes of letters or poems as an individual “book” of Merton’s. It depends!

Many readers and students of Merton’s writings know that he was indeed a prolific writer, producing an immense library, some of which is still to be explored. Most may be only vaguely aware that several bibliographies of Merton materials do exist. Readers of *The Merton Seasonal* are routinely treated to the “running bibliography,” which is presented as a supplement to the most comprehensive written bibliography, the 1986 edition of *Thomas Merton: A Comprehensive Bibliography*. In 1992, Rev. Thomas Nelson released his computerized bibliography, which includes only works by Merton. What the general reader may not realize is that there are at least eleven major bibliographic products that cover a large portion of the writings produced by Thomas Merton, as well as books, essays, poems, and commentaries about Merton.

Five of these resources are currently available to the moderately serious student of Merton. The least expensive of these is *Thomas Merton: Author Price Guide*, the simplest to use is “The Bibliographic Checklist,” the most detailed is the reprint of the 1975 Dell’Isola, and the largest is Nelson’s computer bibliography. Many of the Merton biographies, theses or dissertations, analyses of Merton’s writings, and bio-bibliographies contain very good to excellent select bibliographies.

#### *Identifying Merton Bibliographies*

Since 1955, eleven major bibliographic documents have been produced. They range in size from three major compilations. For purposes of this paper they are listed in chronological order of their publication.

- A. “A Bibliography of Thomas Merton.” By Frank Dell’Isola. *Thought* (Fordham University Quarterly) 29.115 (Winter 1954–55): 574–596.
- B. *Thomas Merton: A Bibliography*. By Frank Dell’Isola. New York: Farrar, 1956.
- C. “Thomas Merton, Trappist Monk: A Bio-Bibliography.” By Marietta Manion. Master’s Thesis. Florida State U, 1956. Available on microcard from Kentucky Microcards, Series A, Modern Language Series.
- D. *Thomas Merton: A Bibliography*. By Marquita Breit. Metuchen, NJ: Scarecrow, 1974.
- E. *Thomas Merton: A Bibliography*. By Frank Dell’Isola. Kent: Kent State UP, 1975. Currently available as The Serif Series Reprint, Books on Demand, Ann Arbor, Michigan.
- F. *A Thomas Merton Bibliography*. By Rev. Thomas Nelson. St. Louis, MO: private printing, 1979. Also on computer disk.
- G. *Thomas Merton: A Comprehensive Bibliography*. New ed. By Marquita Breit and Robert Daggy. New York: Garland, 1986.
- H. “Checklist Bibliography of Thomas Merton’s Major Writings.” By Robert Daggy. *Honorable Reader*. Ed. Robert Daggy. New York: Crossroad, 1989. Revision of earlier checklist available at the Thomas Merton Center of Bellarmine College.
- I. *Thomas Merton: Author Price Guide*. By Patricia and Allen Ahearn. Rockville, MD: Quill, 1990 and 1996.
- J. *The Merton Bibliography*. By Thomas Nelson. Apex Software, 1991. A computer bibliography.

- K. *Thomas Merton Bibliography*. By Zos Imos. 1993. On Internet at Merton Research Institute.
- L. *Index to the Published Letters of Thomas Merton*. By Patricia Burton. Rochester: Thomas Merton Society of Rochester, 1996.

As Dr. Daggy notes in the introduction of his 1986 book, "Bibliographic material on Merton has not been lacking." While this is truly an accurate statement, it is also clear that, with few exceptions, the produced bibliographies are seldom found as a complete set in most libraries, and even then each has its own problems for the serious student of Merton's writings.

### *Finding the Merton Bibliographies*

As previously indicated, five of the bibliographic products are still available through bookstores: *Honorable Reader*, in both hardback (\$16.95) and paperback (\$9.95); the Ahearn and Ahearn price guide (\$8.00); the reprint of the 1975 Dell'Isola (\$61.90); the Nelson computer bibliography (\$60.00); and the Burton index (\$15.00). Also the Imos product is available on the Internet.

Thomas Nelson's hardback, private-printing bibliography had a severely restricted circulation. Copies can be found at the Thomas Merton Center of Bellarmine College, the Kenrick-Glennon Seminary Library (St. Louis, Missouri), and the University of Notre Dame.

Many good research libraries contain the journal *Thought*, so it is relatively simple to find the earliest bibliography of Merton works. While using the article in this manner is not too difficult, obtaining a copy of that issue of the journal for a personal library is more difficult. Used book dealers sometimes get individual copies or bound volumes, but this is a scarce item that is becoming increasingly costly.

The four book-length bibliographies show up in used book stores and antiquarian catalogs regularly. Most major university libraries have one or more available for reading. Many seminary libraries will also have one or more of these books. Prices for both of Dell'Isola's books and Breit's book have remained in the moderate price range (\$15 to \$50) depending on condition. The original 1975 Dell'Isola is usually cheaper than the Ann Arbor reprint. The 1986 Breit and Daggy volume is now a relatively expensive purchase when it can be found, generally costing more than \$100 when purchased from antiquarians. A helpful hint in searching for these books is to ask, "Where are 'Books on Books' located in the bookstore?" A second hint is to remember that Merton books are shelved under a number of categories (e.g., religion, literature, poetry, mysticism, philosophy) as well as in a separate "Merton" section. Finally, many used book stores will initiate a book search for you.

### *Strong Points of Each Bibliography*

It is very accurate to say that each or all of these bibliographic sources is valuable for students of Merton, especially for serious students. Here are their strengths.

- A. Dell'Isola (1955). The major strength of this article is that it began the history of sorting and identifying Merton's works and efforts to interpret Merton. Dell'Isola is the first systematic bibliographer. As an article, this work serves notice that Merton is an important writer. It begins the task of sorting the various versions of Merton's published works by clearly identifying some of the markers of first editions and by providing detailed bibliographic entries for many of the works.

- B. Dell'Isola (1956). This is the first book-length bibliography, containing 93 pages of citations (works through 1956) as well as a set of nine index documents that basically cover the ten content areas of the bibliography. The content areas reflect the struggle to devise a clear strategy for categorizing Merton's written work. Noteworthy in this book is the segment of "Unpublished Works." Most bibliographies fail to pick up this category.
- C. Manion (1956). This product was a thesis; it has not been reviewed in any existing sources. It is not noted in the two bibliographies (Breit, 1974, or Breit and Daggy, 1986) that identify theses about Merton. Two noteworthy aspects of the work are that it (1) provided the first serious listing of literary reviews of Merton's works (a number of these reviews are not found in any other bibliographic source, including Breit and Daggy) and (2) combined a biographical work with the review of Merton's books.
- D. Breit (1974). When this book was published, it filled the gap from the 1956 Dell'Isola book. Indeed, it is precisely that time frame that the Breit book covered (1957-73). Taken together, the Breit and Dell'Isola books provide the researcher with a quite complete Merton bibliography up to 1974. Breit added the important category "Books about Merton" to the categories already identified by Dell'Isola. Breit both added to the category list of the Merton Canon and emphasized some earlier categories by dividing them into their salient components. Her material is presented in an alphabetic order as opposed to the chronological approach of Dell'Isola. The index is an effective research tool.
- E. Dell'Isola (1975). Even though this book is now 22 years old, it is most often used when you want to know the characteristics of first editions of Merton's works produced and published through 1975. This volume identifies most of the variants and errata in Merton's books. It picks up on some subtleties that later bibliographies simply miss. For example, Dell'Isola correctly notes that the Merton material in *Burnt Out Incense*, while in the Fore word, is not a "foreword" but simply excerpts from *The Seven Storey Mountain* that Fr. Raymond included in a foreword he wrote for his own book.
- F. Nelson (1979). The major strength of this privately printed bibliography is as a filler of the gap from 1974 to 1979 in terms of later Merton works.
- G. Breit and Daggy (1986). This is an excellent source book for all Merton works in terms of a comprehensive listing of published works by and about Thomas Merton. Special strengths include the citation of the multiple publication sources for articles, which gives the researcher more than one chance to find out-of-print essays, and a really excellent index for locating a source in the bibliography. This work identifies at least four books about Merton that include very good bibliographies as part of their publication. Since this text has more than seven hundred pages, it easily is the most comprehensive printed document.
- H. Daggy (1989). This is an effective bibliographic checklist of books by Merton. It includes the various publishing editions of each book (including most paperback editions). A chronological presentation is used and even limited editions are included. This is an up dated version of an unavailable checklist printed by the Thomas Merton Center that may also be considered a bibliographic work.
- I. Ahearn and Ahearn (1990 and 1996). This is a specialized bibliographic aid. It presents, in chronological order, a pricing list of Merton first editions. It includes a number of off-prints not listed in other sources. This is a very good listing of books and pamphlets by Merton. A revised list was produced in 1996.

- J. Nelson (1991). The first commercial computer bibliography became available in 1992. This is a very comprehensive listing of the works of Merton. It is capable of sorting by date, or title, or key-word index. Entries may be printed out for research. Book entries include a table of contents.
- K. Imos (1993). This is the first bibliography to appear on the Internet. In addition to this strength, it is the first product to provide many (but not all) of the Library of Congress Call Numbers for the titles listed.
- L. Burton (1996). This is a limited bibliographic aid that indexes the five volumes of edited Merton letters. It provides a source for identifying letter recipients and dates of letters.

#### *Weak Points of Each Bibliography*

While it is true that each of these works has added to the usefulness of the Merton canon, it is also true that each has certain deficiencies that should be noted for the purpose of research effectiveness. Several authors have been admirably self-critical in the prefatory material to their works. What follows is a work-by-work review of salient weaknesses.

- A. Dell'Isola (1955). The article-length bibliography suffers mainly from an unavoidable incompleteness due to the early publication date. Much more by and about Merton has been produced since this work appeared. Dell'Isola chose not to list some unpublished Merton works even though he was aware of them.
- B. Dell'Isola (1956). As the author notes, "later editions and impressions are wholly ignored except those of bibliographic import," so only American first editions are fully cited. He reminds us that he is aware of items that, since he has not examined them personally, are not reviewed. As with Dell'Isola's article-length bibliography, this work suffers—for today's reader and researcher—from being issued before much of Merton's work was published. Dell'Isola noted this when he commented that a bibliography "can never be complete while the author is still writing."
- C. Manion (1956). This is a very limited "bibliography." It does not have many of the categories of Merton's works that existed even in 1956 (e.g., translations). It only comments on books published through 1956. It does not note variant printings or indications of first editions.
- D. Breit (1974). The author notes that this work does not include works cited in Dell'Isola (1956) but is intended to fill the gap from 1957 through 1973. Breit notes, "Since there was...a multitudinous amount of material not indexed, it must be understood by the user that this work is not exhaustive or comprehensive." For the serious researcher, this work fails to give the critical indicators of first editions, variants, and errata. It also does not distinguish, in the section labeled "Books and Pamphlets by Thomas Merton," mimeograph materials from publicly published materials. As is the case with the two earlier Dell'Isola works, this work suffers now from timeliness with a twenty-three year period of productions by and about Merton since it was printed.
- E. Dell'Isola (1975). This work, even with its completeness on the first editions, leaves out the known unpublished Merton works and does not attempt to extend the catalog of works about Merton that appeared in Breit (1974). The author disclaims, "It should be stressed that this is not a definitive bibliography of Thomas Merton." Since Dell'Isola could not find

- some known articles or pamphlets, they are not covered. Subsequent researchers have found new variants of and errata to some of the first editions that apparently Dell'Isola did not personally handle. Some of this additive material has yet to be published.
- F. Nelson (1979). The major weakness of this work is the difficulty of finding a copy of it. The libraries at Bellarmine College, the University of Notre Dame, and Kenrick-Glennon Seminary have copies. Since it was a private publication, many serious readers have never even heard of it.
  - G. Breit and Daggy (1986). Despite the size of the work and a title that denotes "comprehensive," the book fails to contain the extensive bibliographic materials on Merton's books that indicate errata, variants, off-prints, and indicators of first editions. Even this huge work does not list the extensive collection of mimeograph articles and study guides that Merton circulated in very limited numbers. While this work is relatively recent, it is already out of print and, when found, can be quite costly (over \$100).
  - H. Daggy (1989). Since this is only a checklist of Merton's major published works, it lacks all the works about Merton and contains only published dates, hardback or paperback issue (in most cases) and name of publisher. While handy, it lacks the completeness of earlier works.
  - I. Ahearn and Ahearn (1990 and 1996). As in the case of Daggy (1989), this price list contains a very limited listing of Merton's works, no works about Merton, limited bibliographic material on works cited, and most often no indication of variant issues or later press editions. It fails to distinguish clearly mimeo works from publicly published works.
  - J. Nelson (1991). The computer bibliography does not list any works about Merton. While book entries often have a table of contents, they fail to indicate variant editions, errata, and later versions. Many categories found in Breit and Daggy are not present. To be more beneficial to serious researchers, this product needs to be expanded and upgraded.
  - K. Imos (1993). This checklist-type bibliography suffers from several points. It is a listing that does not differentiate variable printings of titles. It is an incomplete listing, even for 1993. It miscategorizes several titles. The titles are in neither chronological nor alphabetical order, which makes the work very hard to use.
  - L. Burton (1996). This specialized index does not address Merton letters found in publications other than in the five volumes *The Hidden Ground of Love*, *The Road to Joy*, *The School of Charity*, *The Courage for Truth*, and *Witness to Freedom*. It is also limited in that it does not identify the contents of the letters.

### Summary

There are plenty of published bibliographic sources to cover most Merton materials through 1986. It is clear that a truly "current and comprehensive" bibliographic source is still needed for the research student and serious reader. *The Merton Seasonal* (the journal of the International Thomas Merton Society) and the book series *The Merton Annual* (volumes 1–9) contain bibliographic sections that provide an ongoing source of bibliographic information. The recent magazine *The Merton Journal*, produced in England, has provided some information on books about Merton that have been published in English but outside the U.S.A. The *Seasonal* entries are quite brief, and, while the *Annual* has longer entries, it is more selective, omitting numerous items.

The immediate production of a supplement to the Breit and Daggy volume that also updates the excellent indicators of the 1975 Dell'Isola volume is greatly needed today.