forth under the wing of the plane he would be catching once it was made ready for take-off. Merton prayed the ordinary prayer of ordinary people in the ordinariness of daily life. *Everything* was included.

I once had the notion to write something on Merton's approach to meditation. What deterred me from the project was the many different ways that he referred to meditation. Meditation for him was a big tent that covered many approaches. In the midst of my research, I wrote to one of the monks at Gethsemani who had been a novice under Merton, asking him to describe for me how Merton taught the novices to meditate. Hoping for the "definitive answer" to this question, I was slightly disappointed when he wrote back that Merton never taught them how to pray. He said what Merton did do was create "a kind of Montessori school" for a life of prayer to develop. In the monastic environment each monk was free to find his own way. Since then, I've heard the recordings where Merton explains to the contemplative nuns on retreat at Gethsemani that he really didn't think he or they should tell their young people to "do" anything. They should just provide examples of what the life is all about. "How do we *live*? Live the life." That should be enough.

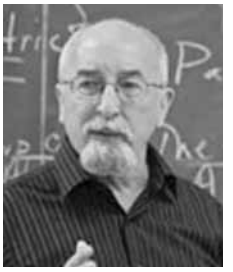
During the last official conference Merton gave to his novices as he was moving into his hermitage,[2] he told them about an old monk who had spent many years in prayer and as he left for the desert with a raven perched on his shoulder, he was "kissed by God." Then Merton commended himself to their prayer. I think this story relates to all of us. As we go about our daily lives – maybe without a crow on our shoulder – whether we are aware of it or not, we are kissed by God. So – pucker up!

1. Thomas Merton, *St. Thomas Aquinas and "The Ways of God,"* 3 CDs (Rockville, MD: Now You Know Media, 2014).
2. Thomas Merton, "A Life Free from Care," *Cistercian Studies* 5.3 (1970) 217-66.

Merton as Radical Ecologist: Principles for Judging Human Action

By **Donald P. St. John**

Today, even more than in the 1960s of Thomas Merton, the earth and its biological diversity are perceived primarily as material resources whose "good" is to be transformed into products that will be consumed at an ever-increasing rate, thereby driving human "progress" and the meaningful movement of history forward. To claim that the natural world is intrinsically or inherently valuable as well as a spiritually creative and purposeful process with which we must coordinate human life and technological actions at all levels was and is considered "radical."



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Merton claimed that there is "a good which corresponds to the real value of being, which brings out and confirms the inner significance of our life."[1] Any action (individual, social, technological) that is in accord with this good and guided by it integrates us into the whole living movement and development of the cosmos; brings us harmony with all the rest of the world; situates us in our place; helps us to fulfill our task and to participate fruitfully in the whole world's work and its history; reaches out for its ultimate meaning and fulfillment (see *CGB* 103-104).

The fundamental requirement of integration challenges the anthropocentric view which legitimizes dominating, controlling and ravishing the earth to serve human "progress." Characterizing nature as a "whole" that is "living" challenges the image of the natural world as a collection of inert material objects and, as with Merton's use of the term *Life*, offers a way of speaking of the unity-in-difference of the divine and human, the personal and natural, mind and body, matter and spirit. Also, the good of a (human) being as well as the "inner significance" of his or her own *life* would be realized in these reciprocal relationships.

In the context of and following upon the first norm, "harmony" here indicates a dynamic, moving resonance with other beings, both comprised by and constantly adjusting to the whole, hence, creating a musical dynamic that is alive. But to have one's act participate in and maintain this dynamic state of harmony requires that one recognize and respect the good and value of fellow beings involved in this creative process. This is not the only time that Merton uses the term "harmony" in an ecological context. He and the many birds in the woods around the hermitage formed an "ecological balance" whose "harmony gives the idea of 'place' a new configuration."[2]

Valuing the unique qualities of natural "places" is important to radical ecology and played an important role in Merton's relationships with nature. Ecologically, our place or niche harmonizes our good with the goods of other beings and of the whole. For humans it requires also a way of acting in line with the creative dynamics of the whole.

In doing our work, we are called upon to participate "fruitfully" in "the whole world's work." Actions that reap short-term benefits for individuals or their corporations but are destructive of the earth and "the real value of being" will not contribute to the future of this larger creative "work." Work that fits into and contributes to this larger human and natural good at the same time "brings out and confirms the inner significance of our life."

Modern ideology finds it heretical to suggest that we reconfigure what drives historical "progress" and align it with some larger unfolding process that mediates meaning and that links cosmic/ecological fulfillment with inner, human values. But for Merton, the attempt to solve our problems by advocating ever-more rapid growth propelled by ever-more sophisticated technologies will only make matters worse, as he suggested to Rachel Carson.[3]

In conclusion, Merton was reading correctly the signs of his times and anticipating the dangerous consequences if humans continue to act under their narrow anthropocentric vision: i.e. self-destruction through the destruction of the living planet. Like many radical ecologists, Merton would call on us today to adopt a more holistic worldview and way of being that develops our own true good and that of the earth.

1. Thomas Merton, *Conjectures of a Guilty Bystander* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1966) 103.
2. Thomas Merton, *Day of a Stranger* (Salt Lake City: Gibbs M. Smith, 1981) 33.
3. Thomas Merton, *Witness to Freedom: Letters in Times of Crisis*, ed. William H. Shannon (New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 1994) 71 [1/12/1963].