Merton and Fénelon: Social Prophets

By **Glenn Amorosia**

In early February 1963, Thomas Merton received a request from publisher Helen Wolff[1] concerning a forthcoming volume of selections from the controversial seventeenth-century French archbishop and spiritual writer François de Salignac de la Mothe-Fénelon (1651-1715). She wrote:

> Today I have a great favor to ask of you: will you please think about the idea of ours with a kind and open mind. . . . [W]e have been preparing, for publication in England and America, a selection of Fénelon letters, to be entitled *Letters of Love and Counsel*.[2] . . . I fear that it might remain a "historical curiosity" rather than a living testimony of spirit, if we do not have another introduction that would deal with the relevance of Fénelon's counsel to the psyche today – a key to the thought that here appears in 18th-century trappings. In thinking somewhat desperately who might lend his voice to make Fénelon heard, you came to Kurt's and my mind. Not least because Fénelon, also, fervently denounced war and – in this well ahead of his time – believed in the fraternity of nations.[3]

On February 16 Merton replied: "By all means send the Fénelon. I like him very much & would like to try an introduction. I will almost certainly be able to do it if I am not too rushed. So I look forward to receiving the manuscript."[4] On May 13, he wrote to Wolff:

> Finally I have finished your Fénelon preface, and I have taken my time. Also I have enjoyed it, and gone into it thoroughly I think. I may even make a few additions if time permits, and send them along . . . In writing about Fénelon I decided to mimeograph some texts from him on peace, and made use of a couple of passages that were in the ms. of the letters. I am not planning to publish this, though it may perhaps be printed somewhere like *The Catholic Worker*. So I hope I have your permission to do this. By sea mail I am sending a few copies of this mimeographed thing. There are all sorts of possibilities in Fénelon. What I like most about the Letters is that the spiritual and especially the problematic aspect is not overemphasized, but his ordinary relations are brought out. He is a most important and interesting figure and one needs to see him in full perspective. I do hope that the preface helps to do this. In fact I have made it rather an "introductory essay" as you will see, and not just a preface saying my what a fine book. (*CT* 104)

Glenn Amorosia

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Merton's two Fénelon pieces mentioned here, the introductory "Reflections on the Character and Genius of Fénelon,"[5] and the still unpublished "Ruler's Examination of Conscience,"[6] testify to his sympathy and admiration for a figure with whom he had much in common.

As editor and translator John McEwen wrote in his own introduction to the volume of letters, Fénelon was born on August 6, 1651, "the younger son of a noble and ancient family of Périgord." He first received "a sound religious and classical education" (McEwen 33) from the Jesuits, then went on to study at the seminary of Saint-Sulpice in Paris, and was ordained at the age of twenty-five. He quickly became a rising star in the French Church, attracting the attention of the famous and influential Jacques-Benigne Bossuet, Bishop of Meaux. After an assignment instructing French Huguenots who had returned to the Roman Church after the revocation of the Edict of Nantes by King Louis XIV in 1685, Fénelon was selected as tutor to the Duke of Burgundy, the king's eldest grandson and second in line to the throne, a challenging assignment with a particularly difficult student. Through Fénelon's diligence, the Duke matured into a worthy heir to the throne. Fénelon wrote various works for the Duke presenting examples of virtuous Christian leadership and royal responsibility, above all the novel *The Adventures of Telemachus*,[7] a "sequel" to Homer's *Odyssey* focused on the education of the son of Odysseus, which was published without his permission in 1699 and became a best seller, the most widely printed book in the first half of the eighteenth century. In the *Telemachus*, Fénelon taught the Duke that a truly Catholic monarch (unlike his grandfather) ruled with kindness and understanding of his subjects and did not rely on violence and tyranny toward other nations. Around the same time he wrote an anonymous "Letter to Louis XIV,"[8] which may not have actually been sent to the king, and remained unpublished until 1787, which McEwen calls "*an astonishing revelation of the reaction of a man of sensitivity and moral courage to the abuse of absolute monarchy at the hands of Louis XIV*" (McEwen 297).

At the court of Louis XIV, Fénelon, who was consecrated Archbishop of Cambrai by Bossuet in 1695, gained the favor of the King's "shadow wife," Madame Maintenon, writing many letters of spiritual direction to her.[9] She had established an academy at St. Cyr for young women, many of whom also received spiritual direction from Fénelon. It was during this period that Fénelon was introduced to Madame Jeanne Guyon,[10] a widow who was developing a reputation as a mystic and spiritual guide. Fénelon had found himself in a spiritual desert because of his over-reliance on the rationalistic philosophy of René Descartes that dominated France in the seventeenth century. Mme. Guyon helped Fénelon to find a way out of his spiritual crisis toward a more deeply spiritual perspective. Fénelon introduced Mme. Guyon at St. Cyr and a number of the ladies fell under her sway, and Mme. Maintenon's initial approval soon turned to envy and hostility. She became determined to rid St. Cyr of Guyon's influence and enlisted the support of Bishop Bossuet in her campaign against Guyon. Bossuet attacked Guyon's *Short Method of Prayer* (*Moyen Court*), which contained a number of questionable statements that Bossuet cited to accuse Guyon of the heresy of Quietism.[11] A tribunal assembled by Bossuet censured Guyon and *Moyen Court.* In addition, Bossuet authored a book[12] on mysticism which condemned Guyon's brand of mysticism. Though Bossuet ordered Fénelon to sign the resulting condemnation of Guyon, he refused to join Maintenon and Bossuet in attacking the woman who had helped him. Instead he authored his own book on mysticism, *Maxims of the Saints*,[13] a series of theses contrasting genuine and false mysticism, defending the orthodoxy of his own spirituality of "pure love," and implicitly that of Mme. Guyon as well.

The result was a bitter controversy that arose between Bossuet and Fénelon, in which Mme. Maintenon and eventually the king himself turned against Fénelon. Their dispute became an embarrassment to Louis, who directed Bossuet to form a tribunal to condemn Fénelon's *Maxims*, but Fénelon further enraged king and bishop by refusing to have his case heard by the French tribunal, instead appealing his case to Rome and the papacy of Innocent XII. The case against Fénelon dragged on at the Vatican. Both sides had representatives in Rome, Bossuet using his own nephew who employed numerous dirty tricks to undermine Fénelon. After two years of this sparring, the tribunal appointed by Innocent found 23 errors in Fénelon's book, though it came short of declaring *Maxims* heretical. Fénelon immediately accepted Rome's ruling and retired to his see at Cambrai, where he continued to write and became beloved by his flock for his pastoral work, remaining in exile until his death in January 1715, a few months before that of Louis XIV and three years after that of his former pupil, the prince. His reputation remained clouded for more than two centuries, until a revaluation began in the mid-twentieth century, in which McEwen's volume, with Merton's introductory essay, played a part for an English-speaking audience.

Merton's initial acquaintance with Fénelon dates back to his schoolboy days in France in the mid-1920s. In an essay on his teacher at the Lycée Ingres in Montauban, he comments:

> A couple of months ago, in writing an introduction to the Letters of Fénelon, I was reminded of Monsieur Delmas, because it was from him that I first heard of Fénelon, a great and sometimes neglected writer of the French Classical age. Fénelon was himself a teacher – tutor to the young Duke of Burgundy, who, at one point, looked as if he might inherit the throne of Louis XIV. If he had done so the history of Europe would have been very different.[14]

References to Fénelon first appear in Merton's journal in the summer of 1961, where he is paired with John Henry Newman as

> Two great men who impress themselves more and more upon my heart, whom I revere deeply, though formerly I ignored them or could not understand them. . . . What moves me is their greatness, the polish of "finished" men who because they are perfect beyond the ordinary seem to have reached a *stasis*. They are no longer ahead of their time, or of it, or behind it. They are above it, and seem therefore old, or of the past. Yet they survive indefinitely. . . . I think Fénelon and Newman look alike, even. And they both have, above all, *style*.[15]

An entry six weeks later noting that "Both Newman and Fénelon loved Clement of Alexandria, which is not at all surprising" (*TTW* 149; see also *CGB* 169) suggests that Merton was reading Fénelon in conjunction with his 1961 conference series on Christian mysticism,[16] where he is mentioned twice in connection with Clement, who influenced Fénelon's doctrine of "pure love" (see *ICM* 52, 75) and once again, in passing, in connection with Bossuet's critique (*ICM* 217).

Once he had decided to accept Wolff's invitation to write the introductory essay for the McEwen volume, Merton included numerous journal entries mentioning Fénelon. Even before the manuscript of the letters had arrived, Merton had begun preliminary research, commenting on March 10, 1963: "Read a little of Fénelon, who is often very dull. Who ever had the illusion that he was *dangerous*?

Yet he is an attractive person, and one loves him for the injustices he suffered with great patience, and for his loyalty to that unoriginal Guyon, who was so discredited and a bit sick into the bargain" (*TTW* 301; see also *CGB* 257). Merton goes on to say that Fénelon is still a controversial figure, even in his own order:

> Everyone is still afraid of him, and the abbot (though he does not say so) is perhaps disturbed that I should now be working on a preface to Fénelon's letters. The man is not *approved*. The great loud bull Bossuet, he is a great man, now, friend of the king. He was powerful, Fénelon wasn't. There is a lot of pragmatism in our popular evaluation of figures in the history of spirituality! How gladly we all fall into step behind Bossuet and Louis XIV and march with the bands, even if they turn out to be Gallican ones (and of course *that* is not approved. But *still*, Bossuet *did* make a lot of noise, and Fénelon, especially at Cambrai, made very little.). (*TTW* 301-302; see also *CGB* 257)

On March 27 he notes that the manuscript has arrived, quotes a couple of sentences, and calls it "Well translated, very appealing" (*TTW* 306). Later in the same entry he goes on to say, quite positively: "He, at least, had a conscience, and put it at the service of statesmen, if they would listen to him. I like his letters to the young prince, the Duke of Burgundy, and his warm, discreet, paternal kindness towards all whom he advised. And his *clarity*, his reasoned judgment, his insight. I like his *quality*. Contact with such minds is indispensable" (*TTW* 307; see also *CGB* 261, where Merton introduces this entry with the comment: "Contrast Fénelon and Eichmann," about whom he was reading at the same time). On the last day of March, his final extended journal entry on Fénelon once again situates him in the context of his times:

> Did I say I was bored with Fénelon? Perhaps the *least* interesting thing about him is his "spirituality" – the "*doctrine*" which is still perhaps in some way thought of as dangerous! Much more interesting than his relationship with poor Guyon is his relationship with the Dauphin, for whom he wrote *Télémaque*, and whom he would have advised had he come to the throne. But the Dauphin died before the old king, who hated *Télémaque*, in which his absolutism was attacked by a bishop he despised as "*chimérique*" – not belonging to the world of power. Now Bossuet, on the other hand: power was something he understood. If they hated Fénelon's spirituality and wanted to find quietism in it, it was because they knew its apparent powerlessness was a protest and an indictment of the spirituality that went with absolutism. (*TTW* 308[17])

Writing his introduction for the McEwen volume was more than just an intellectual exercise for Merton. As he wrote in his journal for April 24, 1963, "Work on Fénelon, which I keep as a meditation, not as work" (*TTW* 316). At the same time, in preparation for the actual essay, he took substantial preliminary notes, nineteen handwritten pages, which are preserved in the archives of the Thomas Merton Center at Bellarmine University. Much of the material[18] is drawn from François Varillon's *Fénelon et le Pur Amour* (Paris: Éditions de Seuil, 1957), cited more than once in "Reflections," and Louis Cognet's article on Fénelon in the *Dictionnaire de Spiritualité*,[19] with further material

taken from Mme. Guyon's *Autobiography*[20] (also cited in "Reflections") as well as information on Bossuet and on Descartes (drawn from an essay by Jacques Maritain[21]), passages from various letters, including those to Louis XIV and to Bossuet, as well as a passage from a January 13, 1710 letter that will be included in "A Ruler's Examination of Conscience," and a quotation from a compilation of Fénelon reflections by Elizabeth C. Fenn.[22]

Merton began his "Reflections on the Character and Genius of Fénelon" by raising the question: "Has the time finally come for Fénelon to be appreciated as he deserves? . . . His worth, his talent, his nobility and his spirit are for the most part too refined for us" ("Reflections" 11). Merton uses the story of Fénelon's trials to expound on what genuine mysticism is and what it is not. Fénelon's defense of mysticism, and specifically of the mystic Mme. Guyon, was the cause of Fénelon's dispute with Bossuet. He decries the fact that history has relegated Fénelon to a lower status than Bossuet, particularly regarding mysticism, in which Bossuet was clearly the inferior:

> He is that 'poor Fénelon' who made the mistake of arguing with Bossuet. As if it was genius, or greater learning, or deeper wisdom, and not political ruthlessness, that enabled Bossuet to secure in Rome, for Louis XIV, the condemnation of Fénelon. One thing is certain: Bossuet knew little or nothing of mysticism, except what he had read about it in books, and he had not read much. . . . But he also knew the meaning of a career, and was too realistically engaged in the practicalities of that career to be bothered with the vicissitudes of interior conflict, or with the experience of trouble and of light which led Fénelon into the ways of the mystics. ("Reflections" 11)

Merton admired Fénelon's ability to see Guyon's genuineness despite her rash personality and frequently exaggerated language, whereas Bossuet could not. Nor would he realize that Fénelon's teaching was perfectly consistent with the "tradition of mysticism that led back through St Francis de Sales and St John of the Cross to the Fathers of the Church" and would subsequently be found in such saints as Thérèse of Lisieux and her "little way" ("Reflections" 12).

Fénelon was regarded by his French contemporaries as "Chimerical" ("Reflections" 13), which meant that his thinking was "vague," i.e., not rational. In seventeenth-century French Catholic culture, mysticism was considered "soft," as opposed to the "practical" Cartesian spirit of rationalism (see "Reflections" 14). Fénelon's character reminds Merton of his own teacher Monsieur Delmas, who was "kind, polite, smiling, modest . . . not a pedagogical gendarme like some of the others" ("Reflections" 14). The concepts of living faith, religious experience and direct contact with God were regarded as "mystical passivity" and thereby weak in the France of Louis XIV. The practices of ordinary piety were considered much more acceptable than the irrational concept of mysticism (see "Reflections" 16). Adherence to reason was a safeguard against the danger of "surrender to passion" ("Reflections" 17). Merton, on the contrary, defends Fénelon and his mysticism, referring to the concepts of the Cartesian spirit dominant at the time as "dogmas of mediocrity" ("Reflections" 15) because they render the life of the spirit virtually impossible, as Fénelon himself knew by experience, having "grown up with a fatal passion for reasoning about everything, . . . caught in the trap of his own sterile mental activity" ("Reflections" 18). It was Mme. Guyon, despite her "neurotic character structure" ("Reflections" 19) and his own lack of natural attraction to her personality, who

was nevertheless "apparently in a position to diagnose Fénelon's illness with an accuracy and a clarity so unexpected as to seem to him providential" ("Reflections" 20). She taught him the need to forget himself and to surrender to the grace and to the pure love of God, to embrace a peace so deep that it could not be subject to comment and to examination, the tools of rationalism. Fénelon learned, and taught, that "useless reasoning" was inferior to "spiritual childhood," that is, to "rest in God like a child in the arms of its mother" ("Reflections" 22). "The whole of religion," according to Fénelon, "consists simply in leaving oneself and one's self-love in order to tend to God" ("Reflections" 23).

Such abandonment of self, Merton affirms, represents "the purest Catholic tradition" of spirituality ("Reflections" 23). Yet in the late seventeenth century, the distrust of mysticism in Europe that had begun centuries earlier culminated in the witch hunt for things mystical that could be considered Quietism, such as the concept of the forgoing of spiritual rewards (see "Reflections" 22). Fénelon's confidence that Bossuet would recognize that despite her sometimes rash statements (such as: "Even if you end up in hell, what do you care, as long as you continue to love God for His own sake alone?" ["Reflections" 21]), Mme. Guyon's teaching was consistent with the teaching of the Church, proved to be a "grave mistake" ("Reflections" 24) that led to her condemnation and his own disgrace when he refused to endorse the denunciations, "putting loyalty to a neurotic widow before his reputation, his career at Court or even, perhaps, his loyalty to the Church!" ("Reflections" 24). His "real 'crime,'" Merton suggests, was to remain loyal to a person who had been rejected by the royal court as well as the court of public opinion, to refuse to submit to the dictates of a royal absolutism that demanded conformity of behavior and even of conscience. Merton opposes the dominant French view of Fénelon, at the time and later, as "a weak, passive, yielding character" dominated by a neurotic woman. Instead he finds Fénelon's loyalty to Guyon as consistent with his courageous critique of "the hypocrisy and injustice of an autocrat who had learned to thrive on flattery, and who was governed by insatiable ambitions" ("Reflections" 26), as expressed in his letter to Louis XIV, in which he castigates the absolutist king for "abuses of power" and "casuistical" justifications for waging a series of unjust wars ("Reflections" 27). To Merton this shows the many-sidedness of Fénelon's genius, an organic wholeness to his spirituality, incorporating the irrational and the unconscious as essential parts of "the fully human life" ("Reflections" 28). Unlike those bound by narrow, outdated dogmatisms, blinded by their allegiance to their political or religious hierarchy and by their own career aspirations, trapped in their own "self-centred, self-complacent, tyrannically demanding superego" ("Reflections" 29), Fénelon represents a holistic Christianity that Merton finds admirable. Like Merton's Cistercian predecessor St. Bernard, "to whom he evidently owes much," Fénelon rejects the doctrine of *propriété* – "the whole exterior, empirical self with its unlimited wilfulness, concupiscence, lust for domination, and all its manifold forms of self-assertion" that "leads only to obsessive and compulsive practices, not to genuine virtue or to true love for God and man" ("Reflections" 29).

Merton closes his "Reflections" with praise of the Archbishop of Cambrai, again comparing him, as he had in his journals, to Cardinal Newman, who would of course be more familiar to an English-speaking audience than Fénelon himself:

> In Fénelon we meet a rare combination of nobility, learning, simplicity, grace and charm which immediately suggests a comparison with Newman. These two great men had much in common. There is in them a kind of harmony and counterpoint

> too civilized and too delicate to be altogether popular in our day. We have come far from such harmonies. But that does not mean that we should cease to listen to them, even if we can no longer appreciate them or adequately respond in our own hearts. Even though we cannot altogether think and write as such men do, we need their spirit and their music. ("Reflections" 30)

In his "Reflections," Merton touched on but did not go into great detail about Fénelon's writings on war and peace. In his second Fénelon text, which presumably remained unpublished because his Cistercian superiors had forbidden him to appear in print expressing his opposition to modern warfare, Merton collects nine excerpts from Fénelon's writings, preceded by a four-page Preface entitled "Fénelon and Power Politics," in which he shows his admiration for and alignment with Fénelon's opposition to war. He borrowed his title from a document Fénelon composed for his pupil, the Duke of Burgundy, *Examination of Conscience on the Duties of Kingship* (see "Reflections" 27-28), and took his texts from works including *Dialogues des Morts* (*Dialogues of the Dead*), a collection of posthumous fictional conversations between actual historical personages, written for instruction of the Duke;[23] the *Telemachus*; and his correspondence, particularly an extensive passage from the Letter to Louis XIV. In his preface Merton emphasizes Fénelon's sense of responsibility in his role as tutor to the Duke of Burgundy and his determination to provide him with not just an intellectual but a moral and political education:

> Fenelon resolved that the next King should be a man of prudence and justice, one who would not only present a Christian facade to the world, but one who would really love and rule as a Christian King, worthy of his ancestor St Louis. So Fenelon composed various works on the formation of the political conscience, according to the standards of Christian morality. He laid particular stress on the immorality of war. ("Examination" 1)

After summarizing Fénelon's relationship with Mme. Guyon and his resulting disgrace and banishment from Versailles, he notes that had his former pupil survived his grandfather Fénelon might have been restored to a position of influence and "the history of Europe and of our own world might have been significantly changed" ("Examination" 2), but such a destiny was not to be. Fénelon's influence was restricted to the written word, and his writings were largely greeted "with contempt, as ludicrous and unrealistic, if not downright subversive" ("Examination" 3). Yet they were in fact "the clear, simple, forceful and accurate statement of Christian moral principles" ("Examination" 4):

> Fenelon made it a point to show that the King's national and international politics were irresponsible and immoral. Wars of pure ambition, egotistical power plays, which others were able to justify by casuistical manipulation of the "just war" theory, were shown by Fenelon to be completely contrary to the true Christian tradition. He stressed the full seriousness of the Christian moral principles which placed the severest restriction upon the use of force even in the days when wars were an affair of professional armies, before universal conscription, air bombardment, and before nuclear, chemical and bacteriological weaponry. ("Examination" 3)

It is disheartening but not surprising that Fénelon's ideas were denigrated by Louis XIV and his lackeys, nor that this view "acquired a quasi-official status in French academic manuals" ("Examination" 3), expressed for example by a nineteenth-century French cleric who declared: "On the day when the French spirit becomes too Fenelonian, the soul of the nation will lose its vigor. That soul has more to gain from the robust good sense and energetic wisdom of Bossuet than from the sinuous caprices of the mind of Fenelon" ("Examination" 4). Only in the twentieth century, as Merton notes, did his reputation begin to be restored through the work of such scholars as Henri Bremond[24] and Michael de la Bedoyere.[25] Today, Merton concludes, it is possible to recognize that "The 'Fenelonian spirit' was not only one of faith, trust, 'pure love' and abandonment to the will of God, but also, quite consistently, one of universalism, and in a very real sense, of Christian pacifism" ("Examination" 4).

This contention is borne out by the selections Merton has assembled. The first, entitled "*Even just wars are evil*" (5-6), notes that violations of the sacredness of human life are endemic even in wars that are ostensibly waged in defense of human rights. The next, "*Love of power*" (6), focuses on the actual motives of rulers who put ambition before justice and actually doom their victories to eventual collapse. The third, "*Militarism – the cult of war*" (6-7), condemns a culture that elevates the hegemony of a single people or state over the rights shared by all humanity. Section four, "*The rule of law*" (7-8), points to what should be "the real goal" of government: "a liberty moderated by the sole authority of law, in which the governors are simply protectors of the law" (8). The following section, "*War is armed robbery*" (8-9), compares the punishment given to individual malefactors with the glory shown to states doing the exact same misdeeds on a much larger scale. Section six, "*France in 1710*" (9), sees approaching disaster since there is "no opening of eyes or change of heart, but on the contrary nothing but blindness and obduracy wherever one looks" (9). The seventh, the long excerpt from the Letter to Louis XIV (9-13), condemns the policies that have led to "All the disasters which have afflicted Europe for the past twenty years, the blood that has been shed, the deeds of violence, the ravished provinces, the towns and villages burnt . . . for the sake of your own glory" (11) and predicts that "the time will come when God will uncover your eyes and make you see all that you will not see now. . . . He will know how to separate the just cause from the unjust, His cause from yours, and in order to convert you first humble your pride. For only by the path of humiliation can you be a true follower of Christ" (12). Finally, the last two excerpts, from the *Telemachus*, maintain, in "*The Tyrant destroys his own power*" (13), that "Nothing is so threatened with disastrous collapse as authority that goes too far," and, in "*The sickness of affluence*" (13-14), that the vice of luxury, disguised as "good taste, the perfection of useful arts, national culture," creates a gulf between rich and poor and leads a society to inevitable ruin (13-14). The final words of the text, "Who will remedy such evils?" is a question that can apply not just to this excerpt but to the whole collection of these powerful selections Merton has assembled from the writings of his seventeenth-century predecessor.

Merton saw parallels in his own life to that of Fénelon. As a writer himself, Merton refers to Fénelon "as the kind of writer . . . who is always a scandal to those who are capable of knowing only a little about him" ("Reflections" 13), an observation that might readily be applied to himself. Like Fénelon, Merton used a vocabulary including terms such as "annihilation," "disinterestedness," "abandonment," "simplicity," "solitude," "silence," and certainly "indifference," which could

disturb the Bossuets of this world in any era. Like Fénelon, Merton disagreed with the rationalism of Descartes. As he wrote in his March 28, 1963 letter to Jacques Maritain, "I think that the spirituality of Fénelon, in its most exasperated and immoderate expressions, was simply a natural and normal reaction to the Cartesian reification of ideas. He wanted to get away from the imprisonment in the cogitating self and be free to love God without the medium of spurious clarities" (*CT* 37). The same desire is evident in Merton's own appreciation for Zen, "a healthy reaction of people exasperated with the heritage of four centuries of Cartesianism: the reification of concepts, idolization of the reflexive consciousness, flight from being into verbalism, mathematics, and rationalization" (*CGB* 260). Merton himself makes the connection in his journal entry of March 19, 1963, noting that he read Maritain's essay on Descartes "in connection with Fénelon," then adding "but it is revealing in relation to Zen" (*TTW* 304), followed by the original version of the comments revised in this passage of *Conjectures*. Similarly, Merton's defense of the peace movement and denunciation of nuclear war, like Fénelon's defense of mysticism, could be recognized as being "amazingly like the ordeals of political orthodoxy in totalitarian states (or indeed democratic ones) of the twentieth century" ("Reflections" 25). Merton and Fénelon shared a contemplative outlook that "hung together" with their anti-war stances. To Merton, Fénelon's mysticism was integrally connected to his opposition to Louis XIV's power politics. In a 1963 letter to E. I. Watkin, Merton wrote: "The Fénelon–Bossuet business, as an official and in some ways almost definitive victory for officialdom over mysticism, is a critical point in history. That is why it is interesting to see that Fénelon, before he got into mysticism, was already also criticizing the autocratic and unjust war politic of Louis XIV. It all hangs together."[26]

Little attention has been given to Merton's appreciation of and affinity for Fénelon, but remarkably, in the earliest book-length study of Merton's work, written in his own lifetime and published shortly after his death, James Thomas Baker presented Merton as a "modern-day Fénelon," referring particularly to the mimeographed "Ruler's Examination of Conscience," a copy of which Merton had evidently given him. He writes:

> Merton's sense of social responsibility is illustrated also by a manuscript introducing his translation of several essays [*sic*] written by Fenelon, tutor to the Duke of Burgundy, heir of Louis XIV of France. Although Merton did not specifically say so, he seems to have considered himself and other intellectuals and monks to be modern-day Fenelons. . . . Merton's intense interest in the life and work of Fenelon was doubtless due in part to his feeling of kinship with this moralist who advised political leaders. Like Fenelon, Merton saw himself as something of a spiritual adviser to the leaders of a nation in trouble, to leaders who did not necessarily welcome his counsel. Fenelon, by addressing himself to the social problems of his day in his role as a priest, justified Merton's own assumption of the role of social prophet. Even the titles of Fenelon's essays which Merton translated agree in sentiment with the topics that he himself discussed during the last ten years of his own life: "Even Just Wars Are Evil," "War Is Armed Robbery," "The Tyrant Destroys His Own Power," and "The Sickness of Affluence."[27]

Perhaps the time has indeed come both "for Fénelon to be appreciated as he deserves," as Merton wondered at the beginning of "Reflections" (11), and to rediscover their common identity and vocation as "social prophets," speaking both to the critical needs of their own times and to the essential connection between personal holiness and wholeness and political and societal integrity and harmony that is needed in every age.

1. Together with her husband Kurt, Helen Wolff was founding editor of Pantheon Books, the American publisher of Boris Pasternak's *Doctor Zhivago*. Her correspondence with Thomas Merton began when she sent a copy of this novel to Merton shortly after publication, at the request of Robert MacGregor, vice president of New Directions Books, Merton's publisher, and continued until the year of his death. For a recent book by Kurt Wolff's grandson on the family in the context of World War II, see Alexander Wolff, *Endpapers: A Family Story of Books, War, Escape and Home* (New York: Atlantic Monthly Press, 2021).
2. *Fénelon: Letters of Love and Counsel*, selected and translated by John McEwen (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1964); in addition to the essay by Merton requested in this letter, the volume consists of an Introduction (31-43) and Editorial Note (45-46) by McEwen and six sections of letters: 1. "Fénelon himself" (47-64); 2. "Letters to his family and friends" (65-108); 3. "Letters to religious" (109-23); 4. "Letters to the nobility" (125-92); 5. "Letters of spiritual counsel" (193-295); 6. "Letter to King Louis XIV" (297-309).
3. Unpublished February 6, 1963 letter from Helen Wolff to Thomas Merton, in the archives of the Thomas Merton Center [TMC], Bellarmine University, Louisville, KY.
4. Thomas Merton, *The Courage for Truth: Letters to Writers*, ed. Christine M. Bochen (New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 1993) 104; subsequent references will be cited as "*CT*" parenthetically in the text.
5. Thomas Merton, "Reflections on the Character and Genius of Fénelon" (McEwen 9-30); subsequent references will be cited as "Reflections" parenthetically in the text.
6. This is a 14-page mimeographed typescript, subtitled "Some texts from Francois Fenelon" [TMC archives]; subsequent references will be cited as "Examination" parenthetically in the text.
7. On the *Telemachus*, see the comprehensive introduction (3-113) to the recent anthology *Fénelon: Selected Writings*, edited and translated by Chad Helms, Classics of Western Spirituality (New York: Paulist Press, 2006) 49-65, which also includes the first chapter of the novel (159-65); subsequent references will be cited as "Helms" parenthetically in the text.
8. As well as serving as the sixth and final section of McEwen, the letter is also found in Helms 198-205, along with an introductory overview (81-84).
9. For a selection of these letters see Helms 169-87 as well as his Introduction (69-72).
10. On Fénelon and Guyon, see Helms 84-99.
11. According to *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, "Quietism designates the mystical element in the teaching of various sects which have sprung up within the Church, only to be cast out as heretical. In some of them the Quietistic teaching has been the conspicuous error, in others it has been a mere corollary of more fundamental erroneous doctrine. Quietism finally, the strictest acceptation of the term, is the doctrine put forth and defended in the seventeenth century by Molinos and Petrucci. Out of their teaching developed the less radical form known as Semiquietism, whose principal advocates were Fénelon and Madame Guyon. All these varieties of Quietism insist with more or less emphasis on interior passivity as the essential condition of perfection; and all have been proscribed in very explicit terms by the Church" (Edward Pace, "Quietism," *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, vol. 12 [New York: Appleton, 1911] [available at: www.newadvent.org/cathen/1260c.htm]). On the controversy over Quietism concerning Fénelon and Madame Guyon, see Helms 84-105.
12. *Instructions sur les États d'Oraison* (1697).
13. For a translation of the complete *Maxims*, see Helms 207-97, as well as his discussion in the Introduction (99-111).
14. Thomas Merton, "On Remembering Monsieur Delmas," in Morris L. Ernst, *The Teacher* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1967) 47.
15. Thomas Merton, *Turning Toward the World: The Pivotal Years. Journals, vol. 4: 1960-1963*, ed. Victor A. Kramer (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1996) 130-31 [6/22/1961]; subsequent references will be cited as "*TTW*" parenthetically in the text. See also the revised version of this entry in Thomas Merton, *Conjectures of a Guilty Bystander* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1966) 15; subsequent references will be cited as "*CGB*" parenthetically in the text.
16. Thomas Merton, *An Introduction to Christian Mysticism: Initiation into the Monastic Tradition* 3, ed. Patrick F. O'Connell (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 2008); subsequent references will be cited as "*ICM*" parenthetically in the text.
17. For Merton's rewriting of this passage, see *CGB* 263: "If the King and Bossuet suspected Fénelon, feared his spirituality,

and wanted to find quietism in it – since in those days you could be condemned for quietism as today you might be for Communism, or 'imperialism,' or 'revisionism' – it was because the apparent passivity, the nonaction, the indifference which Fénelon taught were in fact a protest against the active spirituality that could be used in the service of absolutism."

18. At least some of these sources were evidently provided by Merton's friend Carolyn Hammer, who worked in the University of Kentucky library: see Merton's March 19, 1963 to her husband Victor in Thomas Merton and Victor and Carolyn Hammer, *The Letters of Thomas Merton and Victor and Carolyn Hammer: Ad Majorem Dei Gloriam*, ed. F. Douglas Scutchfield and Paul Evans Holbrook Jr. (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2014) 168, where he inquires about any "other works" in French or English of Fénelon or Mme. Guyon, and his journal entry of March 27, where he reports that they brought "books on Fénelon" on their visit (*TTW* 307).

19. Louis Cognet, "Fénelon," in *Dictionnaire de Spiritualité Ascétique et Mystique*, ed. F. Cavallera *et al*., 17 vols. (Paris: Beauchesne, 1932-95) 5:151-70.

20. *Autobiography of Mme Guyon*, trans. Thomas Taylor Allen (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner, 1897).

21. See Merton's March 19, 1963 journal entry (*TTW* 304). The essay is "The Cartesian Revelation," included in Jacques Maritain, *Three Reformers: Luther, Descartes, Rousseau* (1928; New York: Charles Scribners' Sons, 1955) 53-88.

22. Elizabeth C. Fenn, *Meditations and Devotions from Writings of Fénelon* (New York: Morehouse-Gorham, 1952).

23. See Helms 37-48 for a detailed description of this work, and 147-58 for excerpts.

24. Henri Bremond, *Apologie pour Fénelon* (Paris: Perrin, 1910).

25. Michael de la Bedoyere, *The Archbishop and the Lady* (New York: Pantheon, 1956).

26. Thomas Merton, *The Hidden Ground of Love: Letters on Religious Experience and Social Concerns*, ed. William H. Shannon (New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 1985) 583-84.

27. James T. Baker, *Thomas Merton, Social Critic* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1971) 40-41.