

FRISBEE SMILES

Review of

THOMAS MERTON: A COMPREHENSIVE BIBLIOGRAPHY

Compiled & Edited by

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—Reviewed by **M. Basil Pennington, O.C.S.O.**

Comprehensive would be *the* word to describe this bibliography which brings us up to October, 1985. Merton publishing goes on, both of his own hitherto unpublished works and new editions as well as of works about Thomas Merton. There will be supplements. But any student taking this volume in hand can be confident that he has the field up to late 1985 well covered.

In the Foreword, Brother Partick Hart of Gethsemani, Thomas Merton's secretary, helpfully reminds us of Merton's own division of his literary career: first the novitiate writings (1942), and then a period of required translations and hagiography climaxed by the publication of his own biography (1944 - 1949). A third period saw the production of most of the full-length books that he wrote as books (1944-1955). During the following years he was too occupied (he was novice master from 1955 to 1965) to write more than journals and essays, some of which were later published as books. This was the period of his expanding interests in the areas of social justice and peace and into the spirituality of other traditions. There is in addition to these periods that Merton himself marked out in 1962: the final hermit years and the pre-monastic works. All are covered in this bibliography. It would have been of interest to the user if Merton's own evaluation of his books — a little graph he drew up — was included. It is partial but significant.

The completeness of the bibliography is admirable. Not only are we given the first edition with its contents and all the subsequent English editions (U.S., British, Canadian) with any alterations in contents indicated but also all the translations (again with indications of any alterations in content) and a listing of significant studies and reviews of the books. The listings sometimes include even reprints (It is difficult to discern what guided the compilers in choosing which reprints would be listed) which will prove useful to the user seeking to obtain a copy of the book where it is presently in print — which is true of most of Merton's writings. The listing of the many special and limited editions will whet the appetite of any bibliophile and Merton devotee. Usually where the same book was published with different English titles these are cross referenced (This is not done for some reason in the case of *On Solitary Life* and *Solitary Life* - the entry is just reproduced in full.)

Father M. Basil Pennington is a Cistercian monk at St. Joseph's Abbey in Spencer, Massachusetts. His writings on Merton include "Thomas Merton: An Experience of Spiritual Paternity in Our Time" (1984); "The Circular Letters of Thomas Merton" (1985); "The Merton Collection at Boston College" (1986); and "Thomas Merton and Centering Prayer" (1986). He is currently working on a monastic biography of Thomas Merton.

The first section, “Books Pamphlets, Limited Editions BY Thomas Merton” contains 120 entries, some of them with several pages of information. Section II, “Shorter Prose Writings BY Thomas Merton” has 1,263 entries; it is the longest section. The poetry section, Section III, has 580 entries. There are 58 entries under Section IV: “Books, Pamphlets and Taped ABOUT Thomas Merton” and 91 in the following section, “Theses ABOUT Thomas Merton”. Some of these theses have been published as books and this is duly indicated. Section VI, “Articles, Essays, Poems and Reviews ABOUT Thomas Merton” is another long section, 985 entries, many with multiple items. Section VII, the last, is the shortest with only 31 entries of “Media Presentations & Sound recordings BY & ABOUT Thomas Merton”. And there is an appendix: “Thomas Merton’s Pseudonyms” with 5 entries. It would be yet a gigantic task to get an exact count of the Merton publications because of the many variations under which his works have appeared. The only conclusion possible is that it is enormous, a prodigious output for a man who died at the age of 53 and who actually did most of his work in the last twenty years of his life after his best-selling autobiography.

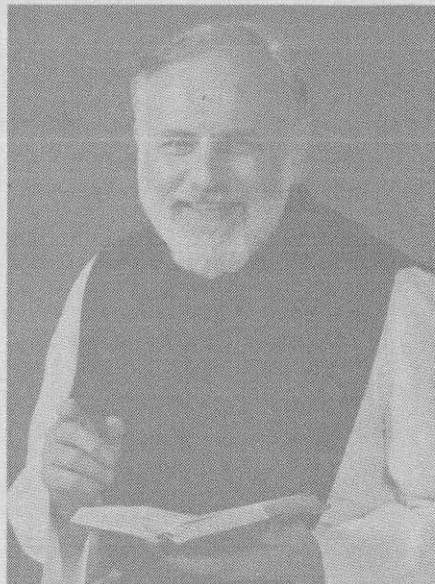
The spacious layout makes the bibliography a joy to use. It is surprisingly compact for a volume of 710 pages.

In such an extensive work there is almost bound to be some minor confusions such as the listing for *The Cistercian Spirit* which was published from Spencer, Massachusetts in 1970 rather than from Washington in 1973. *Merton’s Theology of Prayer* is given as from Spencer on page 382 (correct) but from Washington on page 391; *Thomas Merton, the Man and His Work* from Washington on page 383 (correct) and from Kalamazoo, Michigan on page 392. Such little inconsistencies will keep graduate students busy.

Section VI “Books, Pamphlets & Tapes ABOUT Thomas Merton” contains record of only four audiocassette programs and one video. One wonders why these are here as the audios are included in Section VII “Media Presentation and Sound Recordings BY & ABOUT Thomas Merton” and the video probably should have been. Maybe I am missing the rationale for this division.

The Appendix on the pseudonymous publications of Merton allows this heavy volume to end with a characteristic Merton smile — or is it Marco J. Frisbee or Benedict Monk who smiles at us?

The single all-embracing index will undoubtedly prove to be the greatest contribution of this immensely useful volume. If we look at the entry for “Daggy, Robert E.” we get an immediate confirmation of the extensive contribution made to Merton studies and the qualifications of one of the compilers of this excellent bibliography.



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