

AN IMPLACABLE VISIONARY

Review of

Thomas Merton: Hermana America

Edited by Miguel Grinberg

Buenos Aires, Argentina: Ediciones Mutantia, 1993

122 pages / Paperback

Reviewed by **Lawrence S. Cunningham**

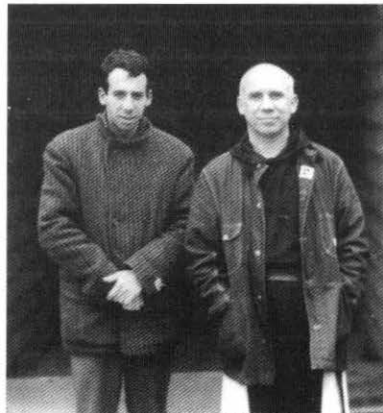
At the end of this volume published in homage to Thomas Merton there is a list of the contents of another volume done by the Argentinean publisher Mutantia under the title *Visionarios Implacables*. The list of authors is formidable: Allen Ginsberg, Albert Camus, Julio Cortazar, Colin Wilson, Dylan Thomas, Alan Watts, Henry Miller, Lawrence Ferlinghetti, and Thomas Merton (represented by a Spanish translation of "Rain and the Rhinoceros"). Implacables, indeed!

This present *edicion de homenaje* begins with an appreciation of Merton as a peace maker-critic by Ernesto Cardenal (written in 1965) who was the crucial link between Merton and Latin American culture beginning in the late 1950s. After a short biographical sketch by Merton's friend Miguel Grinberg (who also edited the volume), there is reproduced a long series of Merton's more engaged essays and poems in Spanish translation, a dozen in all, ranging from "Day of a Stranger" to Merton's prose poetic meditation on Adolf Eichmann and ending with the 1964 "Message to Poets." The volume finishes, as a volume of homage should, with some samples of exchanges between Merton and Grinberg and Cardenal punctuated, finally, with a wonderful poem of Grinberg written evidently in response to Merton's death titled "El Monje Susurra. Interested readers can find a translation of the poem ("The Monk Whispers") in Deba Prasad Patnaik's *A Merton Concelebration*. 3.50" (Notre Dame: Ave Maria Press, 1981).

And why should a book like this appear more than a generation after the death of Merton? Grinberg says, economically, in his prefatory statement that it is because his revelatory vision, still intense and contagious, teaches us still how to observe life, the world, and human torpor.

Beginning in the late 1950s Merton focused many of his considerable energies on the world of Latin America saying more than once that he wanted, in his own life, to be a bridge between North and South. His keenest desire was to go to Latin America as a monk. His struggles to find a monastic life in Latin America is reflected in the letters recently published under the rubric "Vocation Crisis: 1959-1960) in William H. Shannon's *Witness to Freedom: The Letters of Thomas Merton in Times of Crisis* (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1994). That project of Merton's was not to be but this work and others like it show that his dream was not entirely in vain. As Merton said in one of his journal entries, he would have to find "solitude outside geography."

Lawrence S. Cunningham, editor of *Thomas Merton: Spiritual Master* is preparing an edition of Merton's personal journals (1952-1960) for publication. He is Professor of Theology and chair of the Department of Theology at the University of Notre Dame. He will deliver the Springboard Address, "Harvesting New Fruits: Merton's *Message to Poets*," based on the essay solicited by Miguel Grinberg in 1964, at the Fourth General Meeting of the ITMS.



MIGUEL GRINBERG
& THOMAS MERTON
Gethsemani 1964