

the other hand, it was/is a narcissistic age promoting fifteen minutes of Warholian fame. Merton struggled long and hard with his own desire to be recognized. He, no less than the rest of us, resisted the dominical call to “deny the self, take up the cross and follow” the one for whom to live is to die. His struggle, however, was that of a trickster looking for an opening in the fortress of a “selfie society” – an opening to the freedom of love in which the soul thrives. His journey from an ambitious young man seeking notoriety as an American writer to that of an ordinary man living simply, quietly and honestly in the woods, was a creative act whereby that which had become lost in the modern world was restored in a small house not far from the Abbey of Gethsemani. Like Hermes, Merton’s life and words carry an invaluable message for humanity.

In an age where there is much talk about “being yourself” I reserve to myself the right to forget about being myself, since in any case there is very little chance of my being anybody else. Rather it seems to me that when one is too intent on “being himself” he runs the risk of impersonating a shadow.<sup>2</sup>

1. Thomas Merton, *Love and Living*, ed. Naomi Burton Stone and Brother Patrick Hart (New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 1979) 11.
2. Thomas Merton, *Day of a Stranger* (Salt Lake City: Gibbs M. Smith, 1981) 31.

## **Thomas Merton: Longing Yet Belonging – Belonging Yet Longing**

**By Fernando Beltrán Llavador**

On April 8, 1950, Holy Saturday, Thomas Merton noted in his journal: “Everything is waiting for the Resurrection.”<sup>1</sup> Merton’s double condition – of homelessness and at-homeness-in-the-world; his being both filled with hope and deeply aware of contradictions in his own life and in society; the paradox of the gift and need of presence within absence; words in the midst of, stemming from, and aiming at silence, as a way of listening and responding to God’s Word; his detachment yet involvement in the concrete problems of his own time; days lived as a stranger even if more and more convinced of the good of togetherness in genuine community – all of these, in the light of a longing for a Presence which no thing will ever fully satisfy, together with an infinite belonging which nothing can threaten, touch deep personal chords and have a mirror-

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like quality that throws a reflection neither merely neutral nor passive but deeply transformative, and points to spiritual realities which would otherwise be veiled by shadows or lie dormant and ignored.

In May 1968, during a retreat for contemplative women with him at the Abbey of Our Lady of Gethsemani, Merton finished his talk on “Contemplative Reality and the Living Christ” by affirming: “Christ has *really* risen and lives in us now.” Thus, everything is waiting for the Resurrection while at the same time “It’s a matter of Christ actually being and living here and now in us.”<sup>2</sup> This is intrinsic to our condition of liminality. Perhaps it is during the two retreats with prioresses in December 1967 and May 1968 that we see Merton at his best, displaying his full maturity and sharing his wisdom in profound and humane ways, graced with a truly sophianic orientation and dealing with issues to which, while they were originally meant to be explored in an atmosphere of openness and sincerity with just a few contemplatives, we can all relate. Comments like the following, which were fortunately transcribed and can be found in the chapter devoted to “Presence, Silence, Communication,” continue shaking us out of the seeming opacity of our lives and remind us of the beauty and response-ability of our very existence: “God wants to know the divine goodness in us. This is a deep truth, this desire on the part of God to become self-aware in our own awareness. That’s why contemplation is for everyone” (SC 14). That contemplation is for everyone, it seems to me, is a summons to adulthood.

At a time of turmoil and confusion, and as a way to counter contemporary alienation in its manifold manifestations, Merton encourages us to cultivate “Responsibility in a Community of Love,” for “contemplation is not an individualistic matter” (SC 54). And he echoes Christ’s words, “Love one another,” which for him synthesize the relevance and urgency of contemplation today: “let God dwell right here among you. God is experientially present, and we are aware that God is with us. This is contemplation, isn’t it, the experience of the nearness and closeness of God?” (SC 54-55). Living up to the consequences of this may turn contemplatives into prophets, not just survivors; into creators and dancers, seers and doers, explorers of the spiritual art of possibility, no longer alien, but kin to ourselves, to one another and to God; and into nomads of the Absolute, longing and striving for a new heaven and a new earth yet also settlers belonging in him even before the creation of the world (Eph. 1:4).

1. Thomas Merton, *Entering the Silence: Becoming a Monk and Writer. Journals, vol. 2: 1941-1952*, ed. Jonathan Montaldo (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1996) 428.
2. Thomas Merton, *The Springs of Contemplation: A Retreat at the Abbey of Gethsemani*, ed. Jane Marie Richardson, SL (New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 1992) 274; subsequent references will be cited as “SL” parenthetically in the text.

## **The Bibliographer’s Tale**

**By Patricia A. Burton**

Since *The Seven Storey Mountain* hit the market in 1948 and made him an instant star, the way Thomas Merton’s books have been published and sold has mirrored the development of book publishing in his century and beyond. His books have participated in many publishing trends, transforming with the times and meeting the desires of new readers, as they crossed the millennial divide into the twenty-first century.