

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.”² 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.

From the first distribution of *The Seven Storey Mountain* as the choice of three Catholic book clubs, Merton continued to be a favorite in that realm. During his lifetime, his best-selling hardcover books lived in company with cheap paperback copies which spread his work much farther than did the original hardcovers. Publishers of the major works went next to the trade paperback format, reviving the typeset of the first hardcover edition and redesigning their Merton properties every decade or so; bright new covers thus attracted the eye in the big-box bookstores that dotted the landscape, and also appeared invitingly in the new web bookstores, Amazon and all of its kind. It is interesting to note that while many books of selections from Merton's writings (I counted nearly thirty in *More Than Silence*,¹ in English alone) have come and gone, the original books have gone on selling both as new and used books, abundantly available in big bookstores and on the large electronic bookstores and used-book operations on the web.



Merton's entry into the audio book field is progressing well too. There has for a long time been a recording read by Sidney Lanier of *The Seven Storey Mountain* available, but more Merton titles are being added recently, read by Jonathan Montaldo and distributed in various audio formats. The audio cassettes of Merton's novitiate talks have given way to media with larger capacities, CDs and DVDs, allowing the producers to group together a range of Merton talks by subject, making more substantial collections.

The growth of electronic books has been explosive in recent years: it is interesting to see how quickly Merton's books migrated to the new form, beginning with the journals and letters, which the publishers already had in electronic form. Most of the canon has already followed, although it is no small enterprise for a publisher to migrate an older, non-digitized text to ebook format, if it is to be a high-quality copy. So it appears that, as usual, Merton has eagerly climbed aboard another useful platform for his readers, even if he took rather a dim view of some technologies in his time. He liked and used tape recorders and cameras, and would probably have been bemused by the way one of his books could be made to appear out of thin air in seconds, with the press of a "buy" button.

There is no question that the numbers indicate success, at least in publishing terms. Are there other, more global lessons about Merton that we may think of, in this centennial year? Perhaps, aside from the thousand other messages by which he helps us get through our days, this: the enormous popularity of his books (with fans up to and including several popes) might have given him the power to defy his superiors – but he never used it. He could have left the monastery and used his popularity to found a new religious order, or even "cult," and would probably been

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successful in that too. But he didn't. His final imitation of Christ was to acquiesce to his vows, to pour himself out in work, and finally to "become obedient unto death," without ever cashing in. That is what gives his work more staying power than that of the average modern guru whose success may be measured in Rolls-Royce limousines. He wrote about kenosis in his life, but as was usual with him, he also incarnated it.

He is still arrestingly present in his writing, turning his gaze toward us to speak so directly that he makes a live connection. He still, uniquely, invokes in others gratuitous acts of creativity (think of the number of poems he has provoked, and the portraits of himself by others, to mention just two examples). It is hard to think of anyone who has had such a generative effect. Thus true to himself, he has become a monk for the ages, renewing his appeal with each generation of new readers, communicating in whatever medium we choose, perennially gifting us with dimensions of ourselves that we may not even have known we possessed, and helping us to become (in his oft-quoted phrase) who we really are.

1. Patricia A. Burton, with Albert Romkema, *More Than Silence: A Bibliography of Thomas Merton* (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 2008).

A Path to Peace – Thomas Merton, Final Integration and Us

By Nass Cannon

In this time of global disunity, conflict and war, Thomas Merton reveals that our communal path to peace relies on our individual integrative growth. He notes:

At the root of all war is fear: not so much the fear men have of one another as the fear they have of *everything*. It is not merely that they do not trust one another; they do not even trust themselves. . . . It is not only our hatred of others that is dangerous but also and above all our hatred of ourselves: particularly that hatred of ourselves which is too deep and too powerful to be consciously faced. For it is this which makes us see our own evil in others and unable to see it in ourselves.¹

"So instead of loving what you think is peace, love other men and love God above all. And instead of hating the people you think are warmakers, hate the appetites and the disorder in your own soul, which are the causes of war" (*NSC 122*). "For only love – which means humility – can exorcise the fear that is at the root of all war" (*NSC 119*).



Nass Cannon

Addressing this disorder in his soul, Merton's spiritual journey (undertaken not only for himself but us as well) was, in large measure, to realize growth in integration, which meant for him not only union with God and neighbor but also a degree of union with other cultures and religious traditions. Universal

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