

and resentment. Yet we derive a certain comfort from the vague sense that we are “part of” something, although we are not quite able to define what that something is – and probably wouldn’t want to define it even if we could. We just float along in the general noise. Resigned and indifferent, we share semiconsciously in the mindless mind of Muzak and radio commercials which passes for “reality.”<sup>3</sup>

And so on, attentively watching from the freedom of his enclosure the construction of our own unbidden enclosure, our upgraded Babel, and restoring confidence in the “disquieting presence of our deep self [which] keeps forcing its way to the surface of awareness” (*L&L* 41). Beneath the all-encompassing shell of satellite-suspended radio waves carrying the relentless chatter of a mediated generation, a listener with pen in hand generates a different kind of communication, reminding us and future generations not only of deep-space signals from more primal moments, but of that deeper stillness in which we might come to our senses.

1. Thomas Merton, *Raids on the Unspeakable* (New York: New Directions, 1966) 16-17.
2. Robin McKie, “Mania for Mobiles Crushes Dreams of Science,” *The Observer* (11 October 1998) 17.
3. Thomas Merton, *Love and Living*, ed. Naomi Burton Stone and Brother Patrick Hart (New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 1979) 40-41; subsequent references will be cited as “*L&L*” parenthetically in the text.

## The Next Generation

By **Jeff Kiernan**

Thomas Merton still matters because he continues to be appealing to contemporary audiences. Of course, his appeal is widespread – indeed global. One particular group that continues to be inspired and challenged by Merton is that of teenagers. This stems from Merton’s ability to get down to basics, to cut through the clutter (to use a polite term), and to help others raise meaningful questions about life. In short, he is sincere, therefore not phony – and teens can spot phoniness much more quickly than most. Since Merton continually insists on the (underlying) profound meaning of our paradoxical lives, teens readily relate to him because they thirst for meaning as they grow up in a culture that insists on more and more inanity. It is wondrous that this appeal ranges over a variety of topics teens are interested in: social justice, solitude, race relations, prayer, paradox, Jewish-Christian relations, music of many genres, poetry, war, peace, conscientious objection, advertising’s ill-effects and the use and misuse of technology. This list is not exhaustive. Two brief comments from my students who explored Merton may serve to illustrate Merton’s continuing appeal to their peers: “Although you may not agree with every single thing he says, he makes you think”; “His poetry was a window to his soul.”



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