

Two Monks: Thomas of Gethsemani and Seraphim of Sarov

By Michael Plekon

The true aim of our Christian life is the acquisition of the Holy Spirit. As for fasts, and vigils, and prayer, and almsgiving, and every good deed done because of Christ, they are only means of acquiring the Holy Spirit. . . . This Holy Spirit, the All-Powerful, is given to us . . . he takes up his abode in us and prepares in our souls and bodies a dwelling place for the Father. . . . Of course, every good deed done because of Christ gives us the grace of the Holy Spirit, but prayer gives it to us most of all, for it is always at hand, so to speak, as an instrument for acquiring the grace of the Spirit. For instance, you would like to go to church, but there is no church or the service is over; you would like to give alms to a beggar, but there isn't one, or you have nothing to give . . . you would like to do some other good deed in Christ's name, but either you have not the strength or the opportunity is lacking. This certainly does not apply to prayer. Prayer is always possible for everyone, rich and poor, noble and humble, strong and weak, healthy and sick, righteous and sinful.¹

It is amazing to me that Christianity is the most wonderful thing that has ever come to us and yet it seems to have touched the lives of most people very little. Isn't that the way it is all through the Bible? It seems to me that that is part of the message. Maybe that's the meaning of "Many are called, but few are chosen." It isn't that people are consciously bad. Maybe they respond on one level but just do not follow through. Scripture teaches us basic things, God's thoughts about human beings. We have to remember that no one does everything right. We are all sinners. God speaks and we do not listen. On the other hand, the mercy of God is constant. It cannot be overcome. God's promises are absolute. Being Christian doesn't mean "being on the right side." A Christian does not always know where justice lies, does not always see clearly. But the Christian is aware that, while in the human being there is falsity and infidelity, in the mercy of God there is always absolute fidelity. So we reject no one, but still try to dissociate ourselves from anything that is going to hurt other people. Every Christian has to stand up for the truth that God's mercy is without repentance. God never takes back mercy.²

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Two “words” – two quotations from two monks. The first is among the best known sayings of the Russian monk-priest, mystic and healer, Seraphim of Sarov (1754-1833). These lines are full of humanity and compassion in discerning the Holy Spirit’s dwelling in us at the core of our Christian lives and they capture something of the singular, compassionate personality of Seraphim, even if there are questions about how much we authentically know of him and his life.³ The second quotation contains, in my opinion, powerful lines from the American Trappist monk and writer, Thomas Merton (1915-1968), also full of humanity, expressing the limitless mercy of God Merton himself experienced, mercy he believed was given to every child of that same loving God. They recall the divine promise of mercy at the conclusion of the “Fire Watch” passage at the end of *The Sign of Jonas*,⁴ as well as the vision of God present in an urban crowd Merton would experience some years later in his well-known “epiphany” on a corner, Fourth and Walnut, in Louisville.⁵

Seraphim never left Russia, lived and worked and died within the monastery of Sarov, in the Russian Orthodox Church. *The Chronicles of the Seraphimo-Diveyevo Monastery*, along with biographical sketches derived from them, sketch the figure of a monastic priest who at one and the same time was a faithful embodiment of his churchly vocations and yet transcended them all, constantly re-inventing himself.⁶ Later on, much later on, Thomas Merton would discover Seraphim as he became acquainted with the spirituality of the Russian church through émigré writers.⁷ The principal claim of my writing here is that in this ever-changing, developing vocation of holiness, Thomas of Gethsemani and Seraphim of Sarov were amazingly similar. And in this I think there is to be seen an image of the journey toward and with God in our time, a pilgrimage that will find us changing, adapting, being reinvented many times over. I have charted such paths in my trilogy on contemporary holiness and holy people.⁸

Given their historical locations, there is no way they could have met or spoken with each other, these two monks. Seraphim died in 1833, almost a century before Merton was born. Despite resistance from the institutional Russian Church, the popular cult of Seraphim had flourished during his lifetime and virtually exploded at his death. But only in 1903, due to the insistence of the royals, Nicholas and Alexandra, was Seraphim canonized, officially recognized as a saint.⁹ He has been one of the most popular of saints in Russia up to the present day. Even though his monastery was shut down and his cult ridiculed in the Kazan Museum of Religion, affection for Seraphim never faded. When the Soviet era ended, his relics and some of his personal possessions – sandals, monastic cowl, cross, rosary, Bible and prayer books – emerged from safekeeping and now are in the restored monastery church and buildings. So beloved was Seraphim that as émigré Russians settled in Europe, they introduced him to western Christians who in turn were happy to share their beloved Francis of Assisi, with whom he shared many traits, not the least of which was the ability to befriend animals – Francis his wolf, Seraphim his bear. Thomas Merton learned of Seraphim as well as an even more recent monastic saint, Silouan, from his reading of émigré writers such as Nicholas Berdyaev, Sergius Bulgakov, Paul Evdokimov and Vladimir Lossky. Merton’s writing on Seraphim comes from an introductory essay he wrote for Sergius Bolshakoff’s book, *Russian Mystics*.¹⁰

Thomas Merton lived through the tumultuous twentieth century.¹¹ In his youth he traveled across Europe and toward the end of his life, to the Far East where he died suddenly on December 10, 1968 in Thailand, the victim of accidental electrocution. Seraphim, born Prokhor Moshnin in Kursk, never left Russia, and was a monk and priest in the Orthodox Church. He entered Sarov monastery at 19 and remained there or close by for 55 years until his death in 1833. He never studied

at university or a theological school. The little he wrote or that was copied down by disciples is not reliable in the versions we have, for these were censored and edited to make them more acceptable by the well-known metropolitan of Moscow, now St. Filaret (Drozdov). Merton, known as Father Louis in the Roman Catholic Cistercian Order, more commonly known as the Trappists, entered the Abbey of Gethsemani near Louisville, Kentucky in 1941. Educated at both Cambridge and Columbia Universities, he was in graduate studies under renowned scholar Mark Van Doren before entering monastic life, having taught briefly at St. Bonaventure College in upstate Olean, NY. Merton without doubt has been one of the best known and most widely read spiritual authors of the last century. Many of his best books remain in print, decades after their publication and his death. His productivity was astonishing. The books and articles he published, along with the volumes of the journal he kept, the letters he wrote and received, and his poetry, fill many shelves. Merton societies both international and domestic flourish, holding numerous conferences and sponsoring periodicals containing Merton scholarship. During the last decade of his life he worked in the face of church criticism and sanctions from his order. His superior general forbade his publishing on issues of nuclear escalation and opposition to the Vietnam War. Yet Merton engaged with the world of his time, having come to realize he could not be cloistered from it. He connected in a pre-internet era, through postal mail, with hundreds of people – Muslims and agnostics, those in the anti-war and civil rights movements that he himself supported. He wrote extensively about racism and civil rights, the Cold War nuclear arms race and the Vietnam War. After his silencing, essays on peace were reproduced mimeographically and distributed by mail, a kind of *samizdat* that Merton saw as other than official “publication.”

Seraphim lived in an era not thought of as dynamic in Russian church history, that of Alexander I and II and Nicholas I. Peter the Great’s reforms, along with those of Catherine the Great, shrank the number of monasteries and limited the number of those allowed to enter monastic life. Monastic life was also in need of reform, and as Scott Kenworthy has brilliantly shown, there would be a real monastic revival and renewal later on, the movement toward church reform that would culminate in the Moscow council of 1917-18, perhaps the most significant effort in church reform ever undertaken in Russia, but never implemented due to the Revolution.¹² Sarov, the monastery Seraphim entered, was an example of the renewal of monastic life by return to the writings and lives of the earliest desert fathers and mothers and to more rigorous observance. Seraphim contributed to this revival, almost as a one-man reformer; and he seems to have wanted to inject more humanity and a sense of service of the neighbor to the sisters of Diveyevo he cared for later in his life.

In some very striking ways, the course of Seraphim’s life, like that of Thomas Merton, defied the stereotypes of monastic piety, transcended the classical images of the monastic and, I think, says something quite powerful about the witness of monasticism in our time. Paul Evdokimov emphasizes precisely this in a sweeping overview of holiness in the tradition of the Orthodox Church (see *Evdokimov Reader* 129-46). Seraphim’s life was a series of transcendences. He was miraculously healed as a child by the Mother of God and the presence of her Kursk icon. Joining Sarov monastery, he moved through novitiate, various tasks given him in baking and woodworking. He was selected for ordination as deacon and priest, possibly being prepared for leadership in the community. But after over fifteen years of community life he asked for and was granted the life of a hermit in a small cabin, some miles from the main monastery. There he prayed almost ceaselessly, kneeling on a large stone, returning almost to the simplicity of the earliest desert mothers and fathers. He wore

the ordinary clothes peasant farmers wore, only putting on his monastic cowl when at the monastery church for communion. He grew his own food in his vegetable garden. It appears he never renounced the priesthood but no longer regularly presided or concelebrated the liturgy, simply receiving communion with the rest. Though a hermit, he welcomed children and others who would wander out near his cabin. Throughout the year he greeted everyone with the Paschal greeting, “Christ is risen,” calling every person he met “My joy.” A decade into his hermit life Seraphim was almost beaten to death by robbers in 1804. Yet, he begged for their release from incarceration and forgave them. Afterwards his injuries left him partially crippled, hunched over and in need of a walking stick. Elected abbot of Sarov, he declined the office as he had rejected two other monasteries’ vote to have him as their leader. After several more years in stricter seclusion as a hermit, as abruptly as he had left, he obeyed the new abbot Niphont’s ultimatum and returned to the monastery, but this time living as a recluse. He had no contact with the community or visitors, remaining in his cell in silence, praying all the office there. He only came out for communion on Sunday and feast days. Several years passed, and then, again suddenly, guided by a vision or dream to break his silence, he asks another monk to go open the doors – not of his monastic cell but of the monastery itself. And there the monk found a line of people waiting to visit Seraphim for healing, counsel and prayer. This remained the pattern for the last years of his life till his death, a ministry to all kinds of distressed people in need of mercy, but a ministry not welcomed by many in the monastery. He met visitors in his cell, in the monastery complex and out in the woods at his closer hermitage. Toward the end of his life there were many healings, both of physically ill people as well as some whose infirmity was psychosomatic. Seraphim displayed unusual skill in dealing with emotionally troubled people. As if all this healing were not enough, visitors began to experience brilliant, blinding light emanating from his face. The most famous example of this was the encounter out in the woods with Seraphim on a snowy afternoon by Nicholas Motovilov, who left a detailed account of the experience.

Years earlier, at the invitation of his abbot, Seraphim assumed care of a small community of sisters close by in Diveyevo and became a most affectionate father figure to them. His intimacy with these religious women and spiritual care gave rise to both gossip and criticism. This was especially the case as he solicited funding for the construction of a new monastery, activity that also provoked opposition within his monastery and the larger church. But the major portion of Seraphim’s life was filled with what some might call eccentric, unusual behavior. His earlier, apparent conformity to the monastic model disappeared. He became first a silent recluse, then an affectionate, grandfatherly figure, welcoming children, other visitors, spending what seemed to some inordinate time with the Diveyevo sisters. Rarely did he look like a monk, appearing most often as an older peasant farmer, wearing the smock-like blouse and leggings and sandals of his rural neighbors. And as noted, despite enormous popular veneration, Seraphim’s few transcribed words were censored and it took an imperial mandate for his official recognition as a saint. Over the years, the contours of his life – all the changes and new directions – were cautiously smoothed out, brought back into conformity with traditional models of monastic and priestly behavior. He saw, prayed for, anointed and healed everyone who came to him, regardless of their background – this gets buried in later accounts. He said the action of the Spirit knows no status, clergy or lay, or of gender or church membership. This too is sanitized, diluted. As the scholarship suggests, Seraphim’s voice, at least filtered by later editors, became stridently nationalistic, ecclesiastically triumphalist and fanatic, especially in his “prophecies” about the years to come after his death (see Hagemeister, Rochau, Shukman and

Price). Perhaps the radical images of him only remain in the accounts of those who knew him, *The Diveyevo Chronicles*.

Now from the few paragraphs Thomas Merton wrote about Seraphim, it is not possible to get this rich, somewhat daring portrait of someone constantly moving beyond boundaries, continually reinventing himself. In the sketch he provides in the foreword to *Russian Mystics*, also published in *Mystics and Zen Masters*, Merton surely grasps the lightness and luminosity, the Resurrectional/Easter joy and Spirit-permeated attitude of the “little father” (*Batiushka*) Seraphim. While I cannot quote them extensively, Merton’s words on Seraphim also express his own growing criticism of ascetic excess and monastic world-rejection. He contrasts the “negative, gloomy, and tense spirituality in which one is not sure whether the dominant note is hatred of wickedness or love of good – and hatred of wickedness can so easily include hatred of human beings” (*MZM* 181), found in Ignatius Brianchaninov, another popular nineteenth-century Russian spiritual writer, with Seraphim’s “Gospel optimism” (*MZM* 183). Despite the rigor of his asceticism, for Merton, Seraphim “remained simple, childlike, meek, astonishingly open to life and to other men, gentle, and profoundly compassionate” (*MZM* 181).

Seraphim’s simplicity reminds us in many ways of Francis of Assisi, though his life was more like that of Anthony of the Desert. But like every other great contemplative saint, Seraphim had his eyes wide open to the truth of the Gospel, and could not understand how the rest of men could be content with an “enlightenment” that was in reality nothing but ignorance and spiritual blindness. (*MZM* 182)

Merton seems to see in Seraphim his own transformation over the years in monastic life. From his early extreme rejection of culture, society and the world he had inhabited for his adult life, in his best-selling autobiography, *The Seven Storey Mountain*, and from a romantic, greatly idealized vision of monastic life and religion more generally, from the end of the 1950s on, in ways that are striking, Merton followed Seraphim’s path. When recovering from a severe attack by robbers, Seraphim had an “epiphany” of his own, a vision/visit of the Mother of God with the apostles Peter and John. The Virgin said to her companions, “He is one of us” (Zander 20; Goraïnoff 43). In March of 1958 Merton had his “epiphany” on the corner of Fourth and Walnut in Louisville. There in an urban swarm of people he saw their beauty and light, shining more brilliantly than the sunlight surrounding them. He immediately sensed that his vocation now stretched far beyond Gethsemani monastery, to love the world and serve his sisters and brothers. The doors of his monastic life, of his writer’s soul, were opened and would never close, much like Seraphim’s room once he returned to the monastery. He begged for a hermit’s life for years and was finally allowed to live in his hermitage in 1965. Many in the peace movement, artists and thinkers, from Daniel Berrigan to Joan Baez and Jacques Maritain, would visit him there. He was allowed to visit the great Zen scholar D. T. Suzuki in New York and finally he was permitted a long trip, first to the American west coast – he was looking for other possible hermitage sites for at least part of the year – and then to Asia. He went not just to attend an inter-monastic conference and deliver a paper, but in search of the spirituality of the Asian religious traditions he has studied for years. It was a pilgrimage to Hindu and Buddhist sites and to meet a number of spiritual teachers including the Dalai Lama. Yet Merton came to understand it as a much deeper pilgrimage, a confirmation of his exploration of many religious traditions and a rethinking of his own monastic life. Thus in retrospect, it was not surprising that he had another

“epiphany” before the great images of the Buddha at Polonnaruwa.¹³ It was neither a conversion to Buddhism nor a repudiation of his monastic vocation: “I don’t know when in my life I have ever had such a sense of beauty and spiritual validity running together in one aesthetic illumination. . . . I mean, I know and have seen what I was obscurely looking for. I don’t know what else remains but I have now seen and have pierced through the surface and have got beyond the shadow and the disguise” (*AJ* 235-36). He would celebrate Mass on the feast of the Immaculate Conception after this experience and on his last day, deliver the talk on Marxism and monastic perspectives at the inter-monastic conference on December 10, 1968 at the Red Cross conference center near Bangkok (*AJ* 326-43). It was unequivocally a Christian reflection, by a Christian monk, though by one very open to the Asian traditions. And in it is the now famous story about a Tibetan rinpoche, the moral of which was that in the falling away of institutions, structures, tradition, “From now on, Brother, everybody stands on his own feet” (*AJ* 338).

Just as Seraphim met resistance not only in his hermit life, in his work to set up the Diveyevo sisters’ house and in his ministry of healing to all those who came to Sarov monastery to see him, so in the course of his almost three decades at Gethsemani, Merton faced opposition from various quarters. His concern for the civil rights and anti-nuclear and anti-war movements provoked criticism that a monk should not be so involved and later resulted in orders not to publish anything about war. Throughout his life, Merton’s writing for publication was subject to censoring. Some church leaders and readers, both during his lifetime and after, found fault with his interest in Eastern religions and social movements. Merton was notoriously removed from a selection of notable American Catholics profiled in a new American catechism, this despite protest. His Asian and social interests were deemed potentially “confusing” to young readers and his lasting worth as a writer was also challenged. Committed as he was to his vocation as a monk, Merton nevertheless identified the failings of monastic formation and community existence. He pointed to the obsession with rules and conformity, inhuman attitudes toward communication and abuse of power. With some other visionary monastics like André Louf, he wrote to the synod of bishops meeting in Rome in October, 1967 in support of renewal.¹⁴ As recently as January 31, 2014 writer Juan Vidal attested to the freshness, the immanence and relevance of Merton’s restless search for God.¹⁵

Much like Seraphim, Thomas Merton, I believe, saw his ongoing development, his continual reinvention, as a witness to the leading and power of the Spirit. Not a few commentators, including monastics who knew him like John Eudes Bamberger, Matthew Kelty, James Conner and Basil Pennington, affirm this, both his fidelity to the tradition and his capability to move it further on. Both Seraphim and Merton honored the traditions of monastic life, lived them rigorously, but then seemed to rediscover the authentic spirit of the earliest desert mothers and fathers, one which moved from the world but not out of disdain. *Fuga mundi* became *amor mundi*, compassion for the suffering, care for those in need, recognition of the light of the Gospel of Christ.

Both were open to their contemporaries, even those outside the church. Both, I believe, struggled with discouragement and depression, Both did the internal work necessary to following Christ. Both were willing to cross over boundaries in order to show that the Spirit constantly is making all things over, new. Such impulses are, sadly, always threatening to institutional structures, whether of the larger church or monastic life. It was so in Seraphim’s time, in Merton’s and in our own. But if Merton could characterize Seraphim of Sarov as a bearer of the Spirit, a saint of light, a listener to miseries and healer and a “Gospel optimist,” the same things could be said about the monk of Gethsemani.¹⁶

1. Seraphim of Sarov, in Valentina Zander, *St Seraphim of Sarov* (Crestwood NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1975) 85-86; subsequent references will be cited as "Zander" parenthetically in the text.
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) 33-34; the statement in italics came from one of the retreat participants, a contemplative nun; the rest is Merton's response.
3. I profiled Seraphim in my *Living Icons: Persons of Faith in the Eastern Church* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2002) 20-28. In addition to Zander, I also have used Donald Nicholl, *Triumphs of the Spirit in Russia* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1997) and Irina Goraïnoff, *Séraphim de Sarov* (Paris: Desclée de Brouwer/Abbaye de Bellefontaine, 1979) (subsequent references will be cited as "Goraïnoff" parenthetically in the text). As Goraïnoff notes, there are only limited sources for the details of Seraphim's life and his words, including Russian language biographies by Denisov (1904) and Levitsky (1905), published shortly after his 1903 canonization and dependent upon the documents of this ecclesial action. Chief among sources is *Letopis' Serafimo-Diveevskogo monastyria*, compiled by Seraphim Chichagov (St. Petersburg: reprint, 1991); forthcoming in 2015 in English translation is this collection of remembrances and descriptions by Seraphim's collaborators, *The Chronicle of the Seraphim-Divevevo Monastery*, translated by Ann Shukman. Goraïnoff also lists other nineteenth-century Russian publications from the Sarov and Divevevo monasteries and other monastic writers and Metropolitan Filaret. All of the contemporary – that is, twentieth-century – accounts of Seraphim, by V. N. Ilyn, A. T. Dobbie-Bateman, Iulia de Beausobré, Valentina Zander, Lazarus Moore, Paul Evdokimov, are dependent on the same sources. On some of the further problems of texts and sources see Ann Shukman, "The Conversation between St. Seraphim and Motovilov: The Authors, the Texts and the Publishers," *Sobornost* 27.1 (2005) 47-57 (subsequent references will be cited as "Shukman" parenthetically in the text); Michael Hagemeister, "Il Problemo della Genesi del 'Colloquio con Motovilov,'" in Nina Kauchtschischwili et al., *San Serafim da Sarov a Divevevo* (Bose: Edizioni Qiqajon, 1998) 157-74 (subsequent references will be cited as "Hagemeister" parenthetically in the text); *Finis Mundi – Endzeiten und Weltenden im Östlichen Europa: Festschrift für Hans Lemberg zum 65.*, ed. Joachim Höslér and Wolfgang Kessler (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 1998), and Vsevelod Rochau, *Saint Séraphim: Sarov et Divévevo. Études et Documents* (Bégrolles-en-Mauges, Spiritualité Orientale 45) 1987 (subsequent references will be cited as "Rochau" parenthetically in the text). I am grateful to the Rev. Dr. Ann Shukman for bibliographic help.
4. Thomas Merton, *The Sign of Jonas* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1953) 362.
5. See Thomas Merton, *A Search for Solitude: Pursuing the Monk's True Life. Journals, vol. 3: 1952-1960*, ed. Lawrence S. Cunningham (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1996) 181-82 and Thomas Merton, *Conjectures of a Guilty Bystander* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1966) 140-42.
6. See *In the World, Of the Church: A Paul Evdokimov Reader*, ed. and trans. Michael Plekon and Alexis Vinogradov (Crestwood NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2001) 131-45; subsequent references will be cited as "*Evdokimov Reader*" parenthetically in the text.
7. See Michael Plekon, "'This Immense Mercy Was upon Me': Thomas Merton's Reading of Russian Émigré Thinkers," *The Merton Annual* 26 (2013) 96-106. See also the essays included in Bernadette Dieker and Jonathan Montaldo, eds., *Merton & Hesychasm: The Prayer of the Heart* (Louisville, KY: Fons Vitae, 2003): A. M. Allchin, "The Worship of the Whole Creation: Merton and the Eastern Fathers" (103-20); A. M. Allchin, "Our Lives, a Powerful Pentecost: Merton's Meeting with Russian Christianity" (121-40); John Eudes Bamberger, "Thomas Merton and the Christian East" (141-53); M. Basil Pennington, "Thomas Merton and Byzantine Spirituality" (153-73); Rowan Williams, "Bread in the Wilderness: The Monastic Ideal in Thomas Merton and Paul Evdokimov" (175-90); Jim Forest, "Thomas Merton and the Silence of the Icons" (225-30).
8. See *Living Icons*; Michael Plekon, *Hidden Holiness* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2009); and Michael Plekon, *Saints as They Really Are* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2012).
9. See Richard Price, "The Canonization of Serafim of Sarov: Piety, Prophecy and Politics in Late Imperial Russia," in Peter Clarke and Tony Claydon, eds., *Saints and Sanctity*, Studies in Church History, vol. 47 (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2011) 346-64; (subsequent references will be cited as "Price" parenthetically in the text).
10. Sergius Bolshakoff, *Russian Mystics* (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 1976) 7-18; also included in Thomas Merton, *Mystics and Zen Masters* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1967) 178-87 (subsequent references will be cited as "MZM" parenthetically in the text).
11. The best biography remains the "official" one commissioned by the Merton Legacy Trust: Michael Mott, *The Seven Mountains of Thomas Merton* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1984); since its publication the 25-year embargo on Merton's journals and letters ended and there are now seven volumes of journals published, as well as collections of correspondence with Jean Leclercq, Czeslaw Milosz and Catherine de Hueck Doherty, among others: Thomas

- Merton and Jean Leclercq, *Survival or Prophecy? The Letters of Thomas Merton and Jean Leclercq*, ed. Brother Patrick Hart (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2002); Thomas Merton and Czeslaw Milosz, *Striving towards Being: The Letters of Thomas Merton and Czeslaw Milosz*, ed. Robert Faggen (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1997); Thomas Merton and Catherine de Hueck Doherty, *Compassionate Fire: The Letters of Thomas Merton and Catherine de Hueck Doherty*, ed. Robert A. Wild (Notre Dame, IN: Ave Maria Press, 2009).
12. Scott M. Kenworthy, *The Heart of Russia: Trinity-Sergius, Monasticism and Society after 1825* (Washington, DC: Woodrow Wilson Center Press; New York: Oxford University Press, 2010). On the later conciliar reform see Hyacinthe Destivelle, Vitaly Permiakov and Michael Plekon, eds., Jerry Ryan, trans., *The Moscow Council of 1917-1918: The Creation of the Conciliar Institutions of the Russian Orthodox Church* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2014).
 13. Thomas Merton, *The Asian Journal*, ed. Naomi Burton Stone, Brother Patrick Hart and James Laughlin (New York: New Directions, 1973) 231-36, which includes Merton's photos of the Buddhas; subsequent references will be cited as "AJ" parenthetically in the text.
 14. Thomas Merton, André Louf and Jean-Baptiste Porion, "Contemplatives and the Crisis of Faith," in Thomas Merton, *The Monastic Journey*, ed. Brother Patrick Hart (Kansas City: Sheed, Andrews & McMeel, 1977) 174-78; see also other pieces in this collection on monastic renewal: "Project for a Hermitage" (135-43); "Monastic Renewal: A Memorandum" (165-68); "A Letter on the Contemplative life" (169-73), as well as the conferences in *The Springs of Contemplation*.
 15. Juan Vidal, "Letter from Slovakia: Winter, Memory and Thomas Merton," Los Angeles Review of Books (<http://lareviewofbooks.org/essay/slovakia-test-3>).
 16. An earlier version of this essay was present in a pair of presentations to the New York City chapter of the International Thomas Merton Society at Corpus Christi Church, as part of the celebration of the anniversaries of Thomas Merton's birth and of his baptism in that church 75 years ago.