

Dancing with St. Benedict: Thomas Merton's Embrace of the *Rule of St. Benedict*

Paul M Pearson

Coming to the monastery has ... taught me how to live.

The Sign of Jonas

Introduction

The late French Cistercian abbot and writer, André Louf, wrote:

From all quarters people came to him [Benedict], and the man of God refused no one. The monastery was the Paschal city; he welcomed all those who, even secretly, recognized themselves in him. But if he opened his arms to all, he held no one in a possessive embrace. He did not identify himself with any one nation, with any level of society, with any section of the Church. He wanted to be universal, as the new man in Christ Jesus tends to be.¹

No, he's not talking about Thomas Merton here, though much in what he says could well be applied to Merton — he's talking about St. Benedict, the founder of Western Monasticism. And Merton was clearly imbued with the spirit of St. Benedict, a spirit imbibed from Benedict's *Rule* and from his immersion in the monastery as a monk following and living that *Rule*. Merton may have had a 'Franciscan heart' but, as we will see, his whole being was Benedictine through and through to its core.

From Merton's entry to the Abbey of Gethsemani as a postulant on December 13th, 1941, through his subsequent clothing as a novice, his simple and solemn vows, and on through his monastic life, especially in his roles in the formation of the scholastics and novices at Gethsemani, *The Rule of St. Benedict* was a foundational document.

There is little indication that Merton had read this brief document before his entry to the monastery but, knowing Merton, I feel fairly certain he would have found a copy to study.² Certainly, in a journal entry

for November 29, 1941, just days before he would leave his teaching post at St. Bonaventure University for the Abbey of Gethsemani, he makes a brief reference to the *Rule*, comparing it to the Franciscan way of life suggesting that the *Rule* will assist him in giving 'God *everything*' and refusing 'Him *nothing*'.³ Reminiscent of a journal entry Merton had made during his first visit to Gethsemani in the Spring of 1941, writing 'this country has ruined their [Franciscan] rule for them. Only the Trappists, here, have not let America soften them up.'⁴

Thomas Merton and Key Elements of the Rule

Thomas Merton's conference notes on *The Rule of St. Benedict* have been published as volume 4 of the *Initiation into the Monastic Tradition* series edited by Patrick O'Connell.⁵ Dating back to 1957, these notes fall into three distinct parts: Merton begins with an examination of St. Benedict's 'Prologue'; followed by a section dealing with 'the Abbot and his monks', where he treats the chapters of *The Rule* dealing with the general organization of the monastery; and then his final, and longest, section focuses on just one chapter, chapter 7 of *The Rule*, 'The Degrees of Humility'.

In this paper, I want to look briefly at some of Merton's thinking on each of these three areas, and to use Merton's teaching on *The Rule* as an entryway to see the effect of St. Benedict's teaching on him. Also I want to look at some of the major charisms associated with *The Rule* and highlighting their centrality to Thomas Merton's life. Hopefully, along the way, there will be some lessons for us all that we can take away from these two wise masters.

The Prologue

Joan Chittister, in her introduction to Merton's notes on *The Rule of St. Benedict*, identified three essential dimensions of *The Rule* - its moderation, its flexibility, and its spirituality — and Merton in his teaching, according to Chittister, captures the spirit of *The Rule* by specifically highlighting these three dimensions. From the beginning, Merton makes it quite clear that, although his teaching is academically grounded and he has a very broad and deep familiarity with most, if not all, of the major commentaries on *The Rule*, his concern in teaching *The Rule* to his novices is not information but formation. His goal is not for his students to learn to obey the letter of *The Rule* but to learn to use it as a tool to enable them to love and serve God more fully. So, Merton describes his vision for them of the monastic life as 'a life that should take

possession of their inmost hearts' (RSB 6), getting rid of self-love, overcoming the false self, and growing in their love of God so that, in the words of St. Benedict in 'The Prologue':

being girt with faith and the observance of good works and our feet shod with the guidance of the Gospel of peace, let us walk in His ways that we may deserve to see in His kingdom Him who has called us.

After the Prologue, the bulk of *The Rule of St. Benedict* can be divided into either chapters that deal with the organization and running of the monastery, or the organization of the liturgy (8-20). In these conferences Merton doesn't deal with the sections of *The Rule* on the liturgy, so I will pass over these and focus on some of the key areas he deals with in the organization of the monastery, beginning with the Abbot and obedience.

The Abbot and Obedience

Central to the Rule of St. Benedict is the role of the Abbot in the community. In his notes Merton stresses to his students that the abbot is not the manager of the monastery, or the enforcer in chief, but he is to act in the place of Christ. So, the monk's relations with his abbot are to be seen in the light of faith, not diplomacy. For Merton the abbot is a father figure who leads the community 'by his example', and Merton stresses this in his notes, '*he himself must be the first in fidelity to the will of God. He must preach both by word and by example.*' (RSB 83)

Anyone with the least knowledge of Merton's life, especially through certain biographies and through his personal journals, is probably thinking, 'Merton is a fine one to write about the role of the abbot and obedience given his relationship with James Fox!' So, what are we to make of Merton's frequent criticism of James Fox, especially in his personal journals? Firstly, I think it important to remember that these are personal journals which Merton himself expected to edit for publication in due course. And, as with those journals he did edit for publication, this raw material could be totally reshaped for publication. Secondly, I think Merton's personal journals are his version of 'the psychiatrists couch' where he could get all these things thought through and out of his system. Having done that those feelings then do not interfere with his relations with his Abbot or with the other monks. Thirdly, how do we view these 'thoughts' in relation to Benedict's stern dictum on 'murmuring' and its dangers within the monastic community? Benedict's fifth degree of

humility is 'not to hide evil thoughts' but to manifest them in humble confession. And, I think, in writing down these thoughts Merton is manifesting them, examining his conscience and, I am sure, would have talked about the central issues with his spiritual director and/or confessor. I think this approach diffuses the 'murmuring' that concerned Benedict; dealing with it in this way, Merton is not 'infecting' other members of the community and is getting the 'issues' out of his system where they would be liable to germinate and infect his whole life. And, as Merton points out, there are textual differences in early versions of *The Rule*, one saying the brethren should obey 'without any complaint' or, alternatively, 'without justified complaint'. (RSB 45-46) The latter, Merton suggests, fits better with Benedict's deep understanding of the human condition, and that moderation and flexibility referred to by Joan Chittister.

I think a wonderful example of this in Merton's own life comes at the end of 1959. After a lengthy period of pushing for a move to Dom Gregorio Lemercier's Benedictine monastery at Cuernavaca, Mexico, even going as far as applying to Rome for exclaustation and chaffing at what he sees as James Fox's interference in the matter, when he receives his response from Rome Merton takes it and reads it on his knees before the Blessed Sacrament. Afterwards he can write: 'I felt no anger or resistance. The letter was too obvious. It could only be accepted. And this first reaction was one of relief that at last the problem had been settled.'⁶ Similarly, after his Abbot has returned from Rome after discussing it with his superior, Merton writes: 'This is a great relief to me also because we can now go ahead more objectively, without animosity and resentment. I think my relations with him have never been better and I am very glad of that fact ... I have no urge to write, little desire for anything except silence and prayer.'⁷

If you listen to the recordings of Merton's conferences to the novices — over 600 such recordings have been preserved — you will never hear Merton say a negative word about the abbot to his students. Indeed, that fits with Merton's reputation within the community — Merton served on the abbot's council; he was the abbot's confessor; and, most importantly, I would suggest, James Fox trusted Merton implicitly. For ten years Fox entrusted Merton with the formation of the young men coming to join the monastery and, for a time, Merton had around forty novices under his care. Not a position you would give to a disobedient monk, to a monk you considered a 'loose cannon'. The future of the monastery depended on the formation of its new members and formation is much more than the

teaching of a set of rules. The novice master, most importantly, is a monk who truly understands and lives the life, he needs to be an exemplary monk. In 1955, when Merton had sent Dom James a note offering to fill the position of novice master which had recently become vacant due to the election of the previous incumbent, Walter Helmstetter, as abbot of Gethsemani's daughter house, Our Lady of the Genesee, James Fox, on reading Merton's note, so his secretary at the time told me, literally danced around his office in joy at the news that Merton was willing to be Gethsemani's next novice master.⁸

John Eudes Bamberger, a student of Merton's who, with his background in medicine, would later assist Merton with the screening of candidates for the monastic life at Gethsemani and who would serve as an abbot himself for several decades wrote of Merton that: 'he believed in obedience, intended to live by it, and sought to understand what it required of him so that he could put it into practice ... and certainly there was never an instance where he persisted in a course once his superiors told him to stop.'⁹ John Eudes Bamberger compared Merton to the founders of the Cistercian Order who were viewed as rebellious by their fellow monks at Molesmes. Merton, like them, was not afraid to criticize a monastic way of life that had strayed from the essentials. This, according to Bamberger, was part of Merton's 'reforming and prophetic role' in religious life.¹⁰ Merton believed in monasticism and wanted the tradition to truly live again.

This doesn't, however, mean that Merton found obedience easy. He calls obedience, along with humility, Benedict's ascetical practices, to which his friend 'Ping' Ferry recalls Merton saying: 'Poverty, is a cinch. Chastity is harder but manageable. Obedience is a bugger!'¹¹ It is, Merton would say in one of his conferences, the 'most important of the vows' and the 'hardest to do really well', explaining that the other vows get easier as the monk grows older, whereas obedience gets harder.¹²

Life in Community

The monastic community too, like the Abbot, is called to represent Christ. And Merton certainly doesn't view monastic life through rose tinted spectacles. The monastery can serve as a kind of hot house where all these individuals are thrown together, numerous times each day, and minor idiosyncrasies can be extraordinarily magnified. I am sure we're all familiar with similar dynamics from family life! Merton provides his students with some common examples which, judging by their laughter, clearly resonate with them, telling them, the life requires 'much patience,

self-denial, prudence, discretion, mortification, and above all *humility*.' (RSB 107) And Merton takes a phrase of Benedict's from his chapter on how the sick are to be treated, 'as Christ', saying that community relations 'can be completed and summed up in this phrase,' (RSB 114-15) the monk has to see 'Christ in those with whom we might perhaps find difficulty in doing so at first.' (RSB 115) A former Abbot of Gethsemani, Timothy Kelly, tells a story that gives a good example of Merton's relations with his brethren. There was an old monk, Fr Alphonse, originally from Belgium and someone who had never really learned English. Described by Kelly as a 'character in the community' who was fairly marginal and angry. Yet, Merton found time in Asia to send Alphonse a postcard, nothing profound, just a simple fraternal greeting. Timothy goes on to say that he had been in Rome for three years and an action like this had never crossed his mind. He concludes:

that was the true Merton. Very much aware of people in the community and especially the marginal people, and very willing to acknowledge their presence in just a simple show of friendship.¹³

This aspect of Merton can also be seen in his conferences when he talks about community relations or updates his students on news about members of the community, updating them about how novices who have left are getting on or, in occasional eulogies, about monks who have died. When Fr. Stephen dies Merton both writes a poem for him, 'Elegy for a Trappist', and gives a lengthy eulogy to his students:

Father Stephen was an amazing person, an artist, an artist of his own kind. What he produced — there is a modern word for it — is camp. But camp is wonderful, camp is not a word of contempt. Camp is a word that has come into existence in an age when people have learned to see that stuff that nobody ever looked at has a great value and a great character. And here is this work of Father Stephen, it's a wonderful thing, it's really something, it's almost like a poem and yet the material is not at all poetic.¹⁴

Merton both lives, and acts as model for his students, St. Benedict's teaching on life in community, especially as summed up in one of the final chapters of *The Rule* where St. Benedict writes about 'the good zeal which monks ought to have'.¹⁵

As the monastic community represents Christ so, by extension, that leads on to a theme that stands out for many people from *The Rule*, that of hospitality and the monk's relationship with the world.

Hospitality – The Monk and the World

Benedictine hospitality, following St. Benedict's dictum to 'welcome the stranger as Christ' – extends seeing Christ in the community out to the wider world. Although early impressions of Merton were that he was turning his back on the world with his entry to the monastery — *fuga mundi* — he undergoes a gradual conversion back to the world to become the world-embracing monk we are familiar with from the final decade of his life. And Merton's growing understanding of Benedict's thinking about the monk's relationship to the world seems to have played its part in that conversion. In his personal journals, in a passage he would then incorporate and develop in *Conjectures of a Guilty Bystander*, Merton suggests that *The Rule of St. Benedict* contains 'nothing whatever of the Ghetto spirit' in its attitude to the world:

St. Benedict never said the monk must *never* go out, *never* receive a letter, *never* have a visitor, *never* talk to anyone, *never* hear any news. He meant that the monk should distinguish what is useless or harmful from what is useful and salutary, and *in all things* glorify God.

Rejection of the world? The monk must *see Christ* in the pilgrim and the stranger who come from the world, especially if they are poor. Such is the spirit and letter of the Rule.¹⁶

That passage comes very early in *Conjectures* and really sets the tone for Merton's attitude and engagement with the world that we see in that book, including his first published account of his now famous Louisville epiphany. This same approach to the world is also evident in Merton's conference notes on *The Rule*. At one point in talking about monastic withdrawal from the world Merton makes clear to his students that it is not an end in itself, writing 'it allows for getting a grip, a new perspective, returning undivided.' (RSB 120) This is a sentiment expressed clearly by Merton in his introduction to his volume of sayings of the Desert Fathers, *The Wisdom of the Desert*, writing:

The Coptic hermits who left the world as though escaping from a wreck, did not merely intend to save themselves. They knew that they were helpless to do any good for others as long as they floundered about in the wreckage. But once they got a foothold on solid ground, things were different. Then they had not only the power but even the obligation to pull the whole world to safety after them.¹⁷

Like the desert fathers, Merton did not see the monastery as an escape from the world; rather, that by adopting 'a life that is essentially non-assertive, non-violent, a life of humility and peace' he was taking his 'true part in all the struggles and sufferings of the world.'¹⁸

Tools of Good Works

In many of the essays and commentaries on *The Rule*, including Merton's own writings, Chapter 4 of *The Rule*, 'The Instruments of Good Works', comes in for surprisingly little attention. Where Merton makes most reference to the 'Tools of Good Works' is in his conferences to the novices on the monastic vow of Conversion of Manners, *conversatio morum*. There are over 20 recorded conferences by Merton on this vow, but the majority focus on the obligations of the vow. But, when Merton turns to the spirit of the vow, he makes his most important references to the 'Tools of Good Works' suggesting in one conference that the root of this vow is love,¹⁹ 'loving God so much that it just doesn't occur to you to do anything contrary to love.'²⁰ This vow, according to Merton, is part of the invitation to follow Christ, like the apostles in the gospel.²¹ The monk, Merton tells his novices, is in the monastery not just to follow Christ but 'to be transformed into Christ'.²²

Many of Benedict's 'tools for good works' are unsurprising – the ten commandments, the corporal works of mercy, and numerous other scriptural imperatives – however, it also includes a number that are quite unique to the *Rule* and which become themes synonymous with St. Benedict, in particular:

- seeking God and 'prefer[ing] nothing to the love of Christ', qualities seen by St. Benedict as essential to the monastic vocation.
- the theme of peace – 'making peace before the setting of the sun'.²³ Frequently, carved over the entrances to monasteries, including the Abbey of Gethsemani, are the words 'Pax Intransibus – peace to those who enter.
- the theme of God's mercy. Ultimately, we can never accomplish all of this on our own so the final tool St. Benedict gives us is 'never losing hope in the mercy of God.'

As chapter 4 draws to a close, St. Benedict exhorts his monks: 'to pray for one's enemies in the love of Christ; to make peace with those with whom one is at variance before the setting of the sun; and never to despair of the mercy of God.'

I want to reflect now a little further on two of those themes, seeking God and mercy.

Prayer

For St. Benedict prayer is the work of God, and he says quite clearly in the *Rule*, 'prefer nothing to the work of God.' Monks and nuns following the *Rule of St. Benedict* are essentially men and women of prayer. Their whole life is built around the faithful worship of God in communal and private prayer. Many of Merton's brethren at Gethsemani have testified to his dedication to prayer.²⁴ And I recall that once when Merton was challenged by a student from the Southern Baptist Seminary as to why he remained in the monastery, his answer was quite simply: 'I am here because I believe in prayer.'²⁵ And Merton tells his students: 'If we truly have the spirit of St. Benedict we will seek the face of God always in prayer, and will prefer nothing not only to the work of God but also, as did Benedict, to those hours of silent and solitary union with God in interior prayer.' (RSB 35)

The role of Merton in helping Christianity to recover the tradition of contemplative prayer and his influence on the development of practices such as centering prayer is unquestionable. Surprisingly, he had to do the same thing in the monastery, too and a major part of Merton's prophetic role within monasticism relates to this. When Merton entered the monastery in 1941, Gethsemani — indeed the Cistercian Order itself — saw itself as penitential, with an emphasis on hard physical labour, so much so that it had been described as working like an armaments factory in time of war. Merton was highly influential in changing the order's perception of itself from this penitential mentality to contemplative, mining the writings of the founding fathers and other monastic literature and helping to restore what is now seen as the true charisms of the life. In the years before the Vatican II document on the religious life, *Perfectae Caritatis*, called on members of religious orders to 'renew their vocations in accord with the Gospel, the spirit of their founders, and to adapt them to better meet contemporary needs', Merton was already doing this at Gethsemani. As early as 1951, in an unpublished essay on 'St. Benedict and the Contemplative Life', Merton writes: 'Our interest is to show that the very nature of the *Rule* is [the] ideal disposition for mystical contemplation, if it is understood and lived properly'²⁶ — and Merton was highly influential in helping his own Cistercian order to understand this and to live it properly.

Never Lose Hope in the Mercy of God

Intimately related to the theme of hospitality in *The Rule* is a theme central to Merton's life, that of mercy. After the abbot and community have washed the hands and feet of the guest Benedict instructs them to recite psalm 47: 'God, we have received your mercy in the midst of your temple.'²⁷ Commentators on the Rule have suggested that Benedict regards the guest as "the mercy of God" and in receiving the stranger, we receive mercy from God'²⁸ — passing on in turn the mercy we ourselves have received. Merton's experience of God's mercy, expressed so eloquently in the final lines of the 'Firewatch' at the end of *The Sign of Jonas*, was so key to Merton's life that it would be used by his fellow monks on his memorial card at the time of his death:

I have always overshadowed Jonas with My mercy ... have you had sight of Me, Jonas, My child? Mercy within mercy within mercy.²⁹

A powerful choice of word by Merton to express his overwhelming experience of God's mercy, leaving us with a profound example of what St. Benedict means by 'never losing hope in the mercy of God.'

Degrees of Humility

I want to briefly turn now to the third major part of Merton's conference on *The Rule of St. Benedict* Chapter 7, The Degrees of Humility. Merton makes it quite clear to his students, 'Nothing is equal to it in the whole teaching of St. Benedict. This is, in a nutshell, the *whole* of the monastic life,' (RSB 152) and again, 'humility is the way of imitation of Christ.' (RSB 157) But Merton's thinking about humility is not limited to his work with the formation of Gethsemani's novices. Humility is a subject that crops up again and again in his published work, most notably in some of Merton's 'classical' books of spirituality such as *New Seeds of Contemplation*, *Thoughts in Solitude*, and *No Man Is An Island*.³⁰ But all too frequently humility is understood in a negative way and runs against the grain of western culture. From an early age, children are taught to be ambitious and competitive, to do better than their parents, to do well at school so they can get good jobs, so that they can afford the 'good life' and all that is associated with that as continually instilled into us by big business, the media and advertising.

By contrast, in *New Seeds of Contemplation*, where Merton uses the word humility over sixty times, he writes:

It is almost impossible to overestimate the value of true humility and its power in the spiritual life. For the beginning of humility is the beginning of blessedness and the consummation of humility is the perfection of all joy. Humility contains in itself the answer to all the great problems of the life of the soul. It is the only key to faith, with which the spiritual life begins: for faith and humility are inseparable. In perfect humility all selfishness disappears and your soul no longer lives for itself or in itself for God: and it is lost and submerged in God and transformed into God.³¹

In talking about humility to his students Merton uses language about the true and false self with them, the only time this happens in his recorded conferences, saying:

In ourselves there is a self and a self. There is a deeper self. In a person's inmost being there is this real self which demands unlimited respect ... a very deep respect requisite for a person as person, because we're the image of God ... But we're not living on that level. Instead of the person there is the ego, which is not the person, not a fully realized personality, not fully actual ... we're not completely what we ought to be. It is this self that gets stepped on in the ... degree[s] of humility, and that's the self we have to renounce, not our deepest, inmost self.³²

Merton presents the twelve degrees of humility as a way of love, in imitation of Christ, that helps us break through our superficial persona, (RSB 186) our false self, so that selfishness disappears and we are 'transformed into God'.³³

Conclusion

So, what can we draw from all this – from the *Rule of St. Benedict*, from Merton's teaching on the *Rule*, and from the example he left us of living that *Rule*?

In recent years, for decades now, we have the work of the growing number of writers and thinkers who have interpreted the *Rule* for those of us living in the modern world, names such as Esther de Waal and Joan Chittester spring to mind. (And Esther, one of the patrons of our society, really led the way with her 1984 book, *Seeking God: The Way of St. Benedict*, chosen as the Archbishop of Canterbury's Lent book.)

However, Merton predates their work. With Merton we have a man of his time - and many would say our time too - who, living in a monastery

and following the most primitive observance of the *Rule of St. Benedict* available at Trappist Gethsemani, strove to embrace and live that *Rule* himself and then, for many years, was charged with forming unimaginable numbers joining that life and, being faced with the dilemma of how to live the *Rule* today, in the face of twentieth century questions, life, thinking, and society as a whole, in a world far removed from earlier interpretations, especially in the great monastic flourishings of previous generations.

The Rule of St. Benedict, so thoroughly embraced by Thomas Merton, was written at a time when the Roman Empire was most morally degraded and ready to collapse into the dark ages. It sets forth the tools for a new model of community — a model of peace and harmony built upon listening, deference to the other, hospitality, and numerous other ‘virtues’, virtues that were witnessed to by Merton and that were the antithesis of the society of Benedict’s day and of many subsequent ages, including, all too often, I would suggest, our own.

Notes

This paper was delivered at the 2024 Conference of the Thomas Merton Society of Great Britain and Ireland, Rydal Hall, Cumbria, April 5-7, 2024.

1. André Louf, OCSO. ‘St. Benedict: A Man of God for all Times’. *Cistercian Studies* 15.3 (1980), p.223.
2. In 1942, Merton’s first full year in the monastery the Abbey of Gethsemani would publish an English translation of *The Rule of St. Benedict*. In the published book no translator for the text is given, and it would seem highly unlikely that such a new monk would be given such a task. However, in 1949, as Boston College was preparing for an exhibit of Merton’s work, they sent him a list of materials which they planned to include for him to make any suggestions, corrections or changes. The list included the 1942 translation of *The Rule of St. Benedict* and, even though Merton made numerous changes to the Boston College list he didn’t delete this item, and this is really the only evidence to suggest he was the translator. However, one can certainly imagine a man of Merton’s intellectual ability chaffing a bit at life in the novitiate and, just for his own sanity applying himself to translating *The Rule* which, no doubt, they would at that time have been studying in Latin.
3. Thomas Merton, *Run to the Mountain: The Story of a Vocation*, ed. Patrick Hart (San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1995), p.461.
4. Merton, *Run to the Mountain*, p.356.
5. Thomas Merton, *The Rule of St. Benedict: Initiation into the Monastic Tradition* 4 edited by Patrick F. O’Connell (Collegeville, MN.: Liturgical Press,

2009). (Subsequent references will be cited as ‘RSB’ parenthetically in the text.)

6. Thomas Merton, *A Search for Solitude: Pursuing the Monk’s True Life*, ed. Lawrence S. Cunningham (San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1996), p.358.
7. Merton, *A Search for Solitude*, p.349.
8. Alfred McCartney, OCSO. Conversation with author. In his essay, ‘The Spiritual Son’, Fox says that ‘my heart leapt with joy’ when Merton offered to be novice master. Patrick Hart, OCSO, editor, *Thomas Merton/Monk: A Monastic Tribute* (Kalamazoo, MI.: Cistercian Publications, 1983), p.151.
9. John Eudes Bamberger, *Thomas Merton: Prophet of Renewal* (Kalamazoo, MI.: Cistercian Publications, 2005), pp.22-23.
10. Bamberger, *Thomas Merton*, p.23.
11. Thomas Merton, *Letters from Tom*, ed. W.H. Ferry (Scarsdale, NY.: Fort Hill Press, 1984), p.8.
12. Thomas Merton, Recording # 94.4, recorded February 5, 1964. Archives of the Thomas Merton Center, Bellarmine University, Louisville, KY. (5.20 – 7.00)
13. Timothy Kelly, OCSO. “‘The Great Honesty’: Remembering Thomas Merton – An Interview with Abbot Timothy Kelly, OCSO’ conducted by George A. Kilcourse. *The Merton Annual* 9 (1996), pp.202-3.
14. Thomas Merton, Recording # 165.4, recorded October 16, 1966. Archives of the Thomas Merton Center, Bellarmine University, Louisville, KY.
15. RB., Ch.72.
16. Thomas Merton, *Conjectures of a Guilty Bystander* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1966), p.6.
17. Thomas Merton, *The Wisdom of the Desert* (New York: New Directions, 1960), p.23.
18. Thomas Merton, *Reflections on My Work*, edited by Robert E. Daggy (London: Fount Paperbacks, 1989), p.74.
19. Thomas Merton, Recording # 4.2, recorded May 21, 1962. Archives of the Thomas Merton Center, Bellarmine University, Louisville, KY. (23.00 onwards)
20. Thomas Merton, Recording # 147.1, recorded May 17, 1965. Archives of the Thomas Merton Center, Bellarmine University, Louisville, KY. (10.00 – 12.00)
21. Thomas Merton, Recording # 123.2, recorded August 19, 1964. Archives of the Thomas Merton Center, Bellarmine University, Louisville, KY. (9.30)
22. Thomas Merton, Recording # 3.4, recorded May 16, 1962. Archives of the Thomas Merton Center, Bellarmine University, Louisville, KY.
23. RB 1980 *The Rule of St. Benedict in Latin and English with Notes*, ed. Timothy Fry (Collegeville, MN.: Liturgical Press, 1981), p.185. Or, elsewhere in *The Rule*, instructing his monks: ‘let peace be your quest and aim.’ p.161.

24. James Conner, OCSO, "A Dedication to Prayer & a Dedication to Humanity": An Interview about Thomas Merton with James Conner, OCSO', conducted and edited by Paul M. Pearson *The Merton Annual* 23 (2010), pp.212-39.
25. E. Glenn Hinson, 'Oh Happy Chance!' *Weavings* 30.1 (Nov/Dec/Jan 2014-2015), p.38.
26. Thomas Merton, 'St. Benedict and the Contemplative Life'. Unpublished typescript, Thomas Merton Center.
27. *RB* 1980, pp.257-59.
28. Terrence Kardong, *Together Unto Life Everlasting: An Introduction to the Rule of St. Benedict* (Richardton, ND: Assumption Abbey Press, 1984), p.122.
29. Merton, *Sign of Jonas*, p.354. Thomas Merton's frequent references to his experience of God's mercy would lead his monastic community to choose words from this quotation for the memorial card that was produced after his death.
30. The word humility is found 64 times in *New Seeds of Contemplation*, 34 times in *Thoughts in Solitude*, and 28 times in *No Man Is an Island*.
31. Thomas Merton, *New Seeds of Contemplation* (New York, New Directions; 1961), p.181.
32. Thomas Merton, Recording # 25.4, recorded 1962. Archives of the Thomas Merton Center, Bellarmine University, Louisville, KY. 20.30-22.00.
33. William H. Shannon, Christine M. Bochen, Patrick F. O'Connell, *The Thomas Merton Encyclopedia* (Maryknoll, NY.: Orbis Books, 2002), p.216.

Paul M. Pearson is Director of the Thomas Merton Center at Bellarmine University in Louisville, Kentucky and Chief of Research for the Merton Legacy Trust. Resident Secretary of the ITMS, he served as 10th President. He edited *Seeking Paradise: Thomas Merton and the Shakers*, and *Beholding Paradise: The Photographs of Thomas Merton*.