

Thomas Merton Selected Essays

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"Thomas Merton: Selected Essays" by McGregor, Michael ...

Thomas Merton: Selected Essays. Edited by Patrick F. O'Connell. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2013. Pp. xviii + 493. \$50. About two years ago, I tried again to read Thomas Merton's The Seven Storey Mountain, only to put it down after about 30 pages remarking to myself that its shelf life had expired: it had become a period piece.

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This collection features thirty-three essays chosen by O ' Connell who admits in his introduction that every Merton scholar is going to lament the omission of a particular favorite piece of Merton ' s writings. With that frank admission in place one must say that this anthology reflects a mature and balanced selection of Merton ' s prose.

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the recent publication of Thomas Merton: Selected Essays.1 Above all, he was a diarist and a correspondent, one of the great diarists and letter writers of his century, inspired to publish edited versions of his diaries by reading the 1 I have cited six of these essays, each from its original volume of publication with

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Get this from a library! Thomas Merton : selected essays. [Thomas Merton; Patrick F O'Connell] -- "Thomas Merton, the Trappist monk who died in 1968, was one of the great spiritual writers of the twentieth century. His published works include a hundred volumes in many genres. But it was perhaps ...

This volume provides a broad cross-section of Merton's work as an essayist, collecting pieces that are characteristic examples of his astonishing output and the fantastic breadth of his interests. The essays range from the wisdom of the desert fathers to the novels of Faulkner and Camus, from interreligious dialogue to racial justice.

This volume gathers together twelve essays that Thomas Merton wrote for various journals between 1947 and 1952, the years that saw the publication of his best-selling autobiography *The Seven Storey Mountain*, his ordination to the priesthood, and his initial appointment as spiritual and intellectual guide of the young monks at the Abbey of Gethsemani. The essays, most of which have never been reprinted, focus above all on aspects of the contemplative life but also consider the spiritual dimensions of literature and the social implications of Christian life. Issued to coincide with the one hundredth anniversary of his birth, this collection brings to fruition at long last Merton ' s own original plan of publishing these essays as a group and so makes available a previously little

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recognized and underutilized resource for understanding and appreciating a crucial transitional phase in his life as both monk and writer.

This volume is a stimulating series of spiritual reflections which will prove helpful for all struggling to find the meaning of human existence and to live the richest, fullest and noblest life. --Chicago Tribune

Thomas Merton (1915-1968) is one of the foremost spiritual thinkers of the twentieth century. Though he lived a mostly solitary existence as a Trappist monk, he had a dynamic impact on world affairs through his writing. An outspoken proponent of the antiwar and civil rights movements, he was both hailed as a prophet and castigated for his social criticism. He was also unique among religious leaders in his embrace of Eastern mysticism, positing it as complementary to the Western sacred tradition. Merton is the author of over forty books of poetry, essays, and religious writing, including *Mystics and Zen Masters*, and *The Seven Storey Mountain*, for which he is best known. His work continues to be widely read to this day.

This is intended to be a very simple book, an elementary treatment of a few basic ideas in Christian spirituality. Hence it should be useful to any Christian, and indeed to anyone who wants to acquaint himself with some principles of the interior life as it is understood in the Catholic Church. Nothing is here said of such subjects as “contemplation” or even “mental prayer.” And yet the book emphasizes what is at once the most common and the most mysterious aspect in the Christian life: grace, the power and the light of God in us, purifying our hearts, transforming us in Christ, making us true sons of God, enabling us to act in the world as his instruments for the good of all men and for his glory. This is therefore a meditation on some fundamental themes appropriate to the active life. It must be said at once that the active life is essential to every Christian. Clearly the active life must mean more than the life which is led in religious institutes of men and women who teach, care for the sick, and so on. (When one is talking of the “active life” as opposed to the “contemplative life,” this is the usual reference.) Here action is not looked at in opposition to contemplation, but as an expression of charity and as a necessary consequence of union with God by baptism.

When Thomas Merton entered a Trappist monastery in December 1941, he turned his back on secular life—including a very promising literary career. He sent his journals, a novel-in-progress, and copies of all his poems to his mentor, Columbia professor Mark Van Doren, for safe keeping, fully expecting to write little, if anything, ever again. It was a relatively short-lived resolution, for Merton almost immediately found himself being assigned writing tasks by his Abbot—one of which was the autobiographical essay that blossomed into his international best-seller *The Seven Storey Mountain*. That book made him famous overnight, and for a time he struggled with the notion that the vocation of the monk and the vocation of the writer were incompatible. Monasticism called for complete surrender to the absolute, whereas writing demanded a tactical withdrawal from experience in order to record it. He eventually came to accept his dual vocation as two sides of the same spiritual coin and used it as a source of creative tension the rest of his life. Merton's thoughts on writing have never been compiled into a single volume until now. Robert Inchausti has mined the vast Merton literature to discover what he had to say on a whole spectrum of literary topics, including writing as a spiritual calling, the role of the Christian writer in a secular society, the joys and mysteries of poetry, and evaluations of his own literary work. Also included are fascinating glimpses of his take on a range of other writers, including Henry David Thoreau, Flannery O'Connor, Dylan Thomas, Albert Camus, James Joyce, and even Henry Miller, along with many others.

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Essays, meditations, parables, and verse offer insights into the absurdities and disorders of the modern world, the human crisis, and the benefits of Christian hope

Merton, one of the rare Western thinkers able to feel at home in the philosophies of the East, made the wisdom of Asia available to Westerners. "Zen enriches no one," Thomas Merton provocatively writes in his opening statement to *Zen and the Birds of Appetite*--one of the last books to be published before his death in 1968. "There is no body to be found. The birds may come and circle for a while... but they soon go elsewhere. When they are gone, the 'nothing,' the 'no-body' that was there, suddenly appears. That is Zen. It was there all the time but the scavengers missed it, because it was not their kind of prey." This gets at the humor, paradox, and joy that one feels in Merton's discoveries of Zen during the last years of his life, a joy very much present in this collection of essays. Exploring the relationship between Christianity and Zen, especially through his dialogue with the great Zen teacher D.T. Suzuki, the book makes an excellent introduction to a comparative study of these two traditions, as well as giving the reader a strong taste of the mature Merton. Never does one feel him losing his own faith in these pages; rather one feels that faith getting deeply clarified and affirmed. Just as the body of "Zen" cannot be found by the scavengers, so too, Merton suggests, with the eternal truth of Christ.

Includes excerpts from "Seven storey mountain", "Conjectures of a guilty bystander" and many other works including a chronology of Merton's life.

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