



Journeys of Thomas Merton

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An exhibition curated by Dr. Denise Hanusek



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The Journeys of Thomas Merton

Thomas Merton (1915-1968), or “Father Louis,” the religious name given to him when he became a Trappist monk, was a man of the 20th century who made a profound contribution, in the English-speaking world and beyond it, to making the search for God and the practice of spirituality more accessible to the people of his time. He had a short but complex life in which he developed many talents: writer of poetry and prose, photographer, hermit, activist against war and for civil rights, collaborator with contemplatives in other world religions, especially Buddhism, enthusiastic, realistic, and wise supporter of those he believed were seeking to make the world a better place.

In this exhibit will be found a generous sampling of Merton’s literary and artistic work: many first editions of his published volumes, photographs taken by and of him, and an overview of the many aspects of modern life on which he made his mark. As we celebrate the 100th anniversary of his birth, we find that his contribution to the welfare of the world is as relevant and timely today as it was when he first raised his voice as a modern-day prophet.

CASE 1:

Journey through Childhood and Early Education

Thomas Merton was born in Prades, France on January 31, 1915. His parents were Owen Merton of New Zealand, and Ruth Jenkins Merton of America, both artists. His one younger brother was named John Paul. Merton was only six years old when his mother died and was orphaned at sixteen on the death of his father. He had spent his childhood wandering with his father from the United States to Bermuda to France to England and attending several boarding schools along the way. Realizing while quite young that he had a gift for writing, he used that gift in the various schools he attended. While attending Oakham school in England, he wrote for and served as editor of the school paper *The Oakhamian*.

- a. Merton, Owen. *Amalfi*, 1913. Watercolor. Courtesy of the Thomas Merton Center at Bellarmine University.
- b. Photographs courtesy of The Thomas Merton Center at Bellarmine University.
- c. Photocopies of articles from the *Oakhamian* courtesy of Thomas Merton Collection (MER), University of Notre Dame Archives (UNDA), Notre Dame, Indiana

CASE 2:

The Seven Storey Mountain and Its Translations

Thomas Merton became world famous after the publication of his autobiography *The Seven Storey Mountain* in 1948, some years after his entrance into the Abbey of Our Lady of Gethsemani in Trappist, Kentucky. Eventually, it was translated into more than twenty different languages. Here are displayed a first edition of the original English edition of the work and seven translations: Dutch, French, German, Italian, Korean, Polish, and Spanish.

a.-b. Thomas Merton. *The Seven Storey Mountain*. New York: Harcourt Brace, 1948. 1st edition.

The first edition of *The Seven Storey Mountain* was comprised of 6,000 copies. A small number of these were bound in white cloth with black lettering on the spine and a first state dust jacket. Pitts Theology Library owns one of these very rare first editions with the call number 1948 MERT B. It also contains a publisher’s compliments slip glued to the front cover. The majority of the first edition was bound in black cloth with gold lettering on the spine, with a grey dust-wrapper and red-tan spine. Pitts Theology Library’s copy with this binding has the call number 1948 MERT E.

Translations:

- c. (Dutch) *Louteringsberg*. Utrecht: Uitgeverij het Spectrum, 1949.
1949 MERT I
- d. (French) *La nuit privée d'étoiles*. Paris: Albin Michel, 1951.
1951 MERT D
- e. (German) *Der Berg der sieben Stufen*. Zurich: Benziger Verlag, 1950.
1950 MERT D
- f. (Italian) *La montagna dalle sette balze*. Milan: Garzanti, 2010.
2013 MERT
- g. (Korean) *Ch'ilch'üngsan*. Söul T'ükpyölsi: Paoro Ttal, 2014.
2014 MERT
- h. (Polish) *Siedmiopietrowa góra*. Poznań: Zysk i S-ka Wydawnictwo, [2008] c1998.
2008 MERT A
- i. (Spanish) *La montaña de los siete círculos*. Barcelona: Edhasa, 2008.
2008 MERT

CASE 3:

Journey through University in Cambridge, England and New York

Merton left Oakham School with a scholarship to Clare College of Cambridge University. He spent one unhappy year at Cambridge, during which time he fathered a child, and then, on the insistence of his British guardian, set sail for his grandparents' home in Long Island, New York. He applied to Columbia and finished his undergraduate work there, finding the atmosphere of the American university much more congenial. He became very involved in campus publications and wrote for the Columbia *Jester*, the *Spectator*, and the *Columbia Review*. While attending Columbia, he formed life-long friendships with Bob Lax, Robert Giroux, Ed Rice, who served as his godfather when he was baptized into Catholicism, and Dan Walsh, to whom Merton turned for advice concerning his desire to become a priest.

- a. Article by Merton for the *Granta* of Cambridge University. Thomas Merton Collection (MER), University of Notre Dame Archives (UNDA), Notre Dame, Indiana.
- b. Photographs courtesy of The Thomas Merton Center at Bellarmine University.
- c. Articles by Merton for the *Jester* and the *Spectator*. Thomas Merton Collection (MER), University of Notre Dame Archives (UNDA), Notre Dame, Indiana.
- d. Cover of the *Jester*. Courtesy Columbia University Archives.

CASE 4:

Selected Publications of Thomas Merton

In this case is included a sampling of some of the various genres of Merton's writings: biography, poetry and prose.

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- a. *What are these wounds?: The life of a Cistercian mystic, Saint Lutgarde of Aywières*. Milwaukee: Bruce, 1950.
1950 MERT A
 - b. *The ascent to truth*. New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1951.
Merton's interpretation of the teaching of St. John of the Cross.
1951 MERT
 - c. *No man is an island*. New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1955.
Meditations and essays on the spiritual life; sequel to *Seeds of Contemplation*.
1955 MERT
 - d. *Disputed questions*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Cudahy, 1960.
Book of essays on a range of topics in spirituality and philosophy.
1960 MERT
 - e. *The behavior of titans*. New York: New Directions, 1961.
Essay on Christian ethics, especially the ideas of power and responsibility
1961 MERT E

f. *Raids on the unspeakable*. New York: New Directions, 1966.

Essays on philosophical theology.

1966 MERT A

g. *My argument with the Gestapo*. Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1969.

Autobiographical novel written before Merton entered the Abbey of Gethsemani.

1969 MERT

h. *The geography of Lograire*. New York: New Directions, 1969.

Essays and poems.

1969 MERT C

CASE 5:

Journey to Conversion

Merton's interest in Roman Catholicism began with a vacation trip to Rome in 1931. It was re-awakened while he was a student at Columbia University and read Etienne Gilson's *The Spirit of Medieval Philosophy* in 1937. In 1938 while doing research on Gerard Manley Hopkins, Merton read a biography of Hopkins by the Jesuit G. F. Lahey. It was while reading Lahey's account of Hopkins struggle to surrender to his conversion from Anglicanism to Roman Catholicism that Merton reached the point of making his own decision to convert.

a. Lahey, G. F. *Gerard Manley Hopkins*. London: Oxford University Press, 1930.

b. Hopkins, Gerard Manley. *Poems of Gerard Manley Hopkins: Now first published*. Edited by Robert Bridges. London: H. Milford, 1918.

CASE 6:

Journey to Gethsemani

Merton made an Easter retreat at the Trappist Abbey of Our Lady of Gethsemani in April of 1941. He immediately felt drawn to the place. In December of 1941, Merton returned to the Abbey to ask to be admitted there. After a three-day wait, he was accepted by the abbot, Dom Frederick Dunne as a postulant choir monk. He became a novice in

February, 1942 and was given the name Brother Mary Louis. Among Merton's published works are several that describe monastic life and the history of the Trappists in the United States.

a. *The waters of Siloe*. New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1949.

History of the Trappist Order, especially in the United States.

1949 MERT C

b. *The silent life*. New York: Farrar, Straus & Cudahy, 1957.

1957 MERT C

c. *Monastic peace*. Trappist, Kentucky: Abbey of Gethsemani, 1958.

1958 MERT B

d. *Come to the mountain: new ways and living traditions in the monastic life*. [Trappist, Kentucky: Abbey of Gethsemani, 1964]

1964 COME

CASE 7:

The poetry of Thomas Merton

Thomas Merton published nine volumes of poetry while a monk of Gethsemani, including a posthumous collected volume. *30 Poems*, published in 1944 by New Directions, was his first published book. According to James Thomas Baker, this early poetry was some of the best of his career. His poetry has not always received glowing reviews. William Henry Shannon argued that much of the "over a thousand pages" of his poetic output was mediocre and even "plain bad" but that there was also "fine poetry" to be found there. Much fine poetry can be found in the volumes of this display.

a. *Thirty Poems*. Norfolk, Conn.: New Directions, 1944.

1944 MERT

b. *A man in a divided sea*. Norfolk, Conn.: New Directions, 1946.

1946 MERT

c. *Figures for an apocalypse*. Norfolk, Conn.: New Directions, 1948.

1947 MERT

- d. *The tears of the blind lions*. New York: New Directions, 1949.
1949 MERT C
- e. *The strange islands*. New York: New Directions, 1957.
1957 MERT D
- f. *Selected poems of Thomas Merton*. Enlarged ed. New York: New Directions, 1967.
1967 MERT A
- g. *Emblems of a season of fury*. New York: New Directions, 1963.
1963 MERT B
- h. *Cables to the ace*. New York: New Directions, 1968.
1968 MERT A

CASE 8:

Early years at Gethsemani

Dom Frederick Dunne, Abbot of Gethsemani in 1941, was the son of a publisher. He soon realized that he had a very talented young monk in Thomas Merton. Contrary to the custom of the time which would have kept a novice monk from any activity which might have worked against the development of humility, the abbot decided to put Merton's writing ability to work for the Abbey. He began by asking Merton to make translations of Cistercian literature from Latin into English beginning around 1943. Merton soon moved on to producing original work including accounts of Cistercian life and biographies of Cistercian saints. Before he achieved personal fame with the publication of *The Seven Storey Mountain*, Merton was identified in these works only as a "monk of Our Lady of Gethsemani."

Early translation work:

- a. Saint Jean Eudes. *The life and the kingdom of Jesus in Christian souls: a treatise on Christian perfection for use by clergy or laity*. Translated from the French by a Trappist father in the Abbey of Our Lady of Gethsemani. New York: P.J. Kennedy, 1946.
1946 EUDE
- b. Jean-Baptiste Chautard, O.C.S.O. *The soul of the apostolate*. Translated by a monk of Our Lady of Gethsemani [Thomas Merton]. Trappist, Kentucky: Abbey of Gethsemani, 1946.
1946 CHAU

- c. *The Spirit of simplicity characteristic of the Cistercian Order: An official report, demanded and approved by the General Chapter together with texts from St. Bernard of Clairvaux on interior simplicity*. Translation and commentary by a Cistercian monk of Our Lady of Gethsemani. Trappist, Kentucky: Abbey of Gethsemani, 1948.
1948 SPIR

Early original writing:

- d. *Cistercian contemplatives: A guide to Trappist life*. Trappist, Kentucky: Monk of Our Lady of Gethsemani [Abbey], 1948.
1948 CIST
- e. *Exile ends in glory: The life of a Trappistine, Mother M. Berchmans, O.C.S.O.* Milwaukee: Bruce, 1948.
1948 EXIL

CASE 9:

Journey into the Liturgy

Because of his classical training at the boarding schools he attended in Europe, Merton came to Gethsemani already well-versed in Latin. This was very useful in an Order in which the Latin liturgy was so central to the activity of each day. He also came with an appreciation for the physical mechanics as well as the meaning of liturgy and its pageantry. This is an essential ingredient in the personality for anyone desiring to enter any branch or reform of the Benedictine Order in which the performance of the liturgy is paramount. Merton expressed his appreciation for liturgy in various writings throughout his career as a Trappist monk.

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- a. *Gethsemani Magnificat : centenary of Gethsemani Abbey*. Trappist, Kentucky : [Abbey of Gethsemani], 1949.
1949 GETH
- b. *Bread in the wilderness*. New York : New Directions, 1953.
1953 MERT B
- c. *The living bread*. New York : Farrar, Straus & Cudahy, 1956.
1956 MERT
- d. *Praying the psalms*. Collegeville, Minn. : Liturgical Press, 1956.
1956 MERT A

- e. *Seasons of celebration*. New York : Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1965.
1965 MERT A
- f. *Opening the Bible*. Collegeville, Minn. : Liturgical Press, 1970.
1970 MERT

CASE 10:

Journey to Teaching

Merton served as Master of Scholastics, those studying for the priesthood, from 1951 to 1955, beginning this appointment only four years after making his own solemn profession. He served as Master of Novices from 1955 to 1965, the year in which he became a full-time hermit. Merton had gained experience as a teacher by teaching English literature at St. Bonaventure College in Olean, New York in the two years just prior to his entrance into the Abbey of Gethsemani. Many of his classes at Gethsemani were recorded on audiotape. He also produced books that described the monastic life in general and life at the Abbey of Gethsemani in particular. This description of what Cistercian monastic life is, is one of the most important things that he would have needed to instill in the novices under his care.

- a. *The silent life*. New York: Farrar, Straus & Cudahy, 1957.
1957 MERT C
- b. *Monastic peace*. Trappist, Kentucky: Abbey of Gethsemani, 1958.
1958 MERT B
- c. *Come to the mountain*. [Trappist, Kentucky: Abbey of Gethsemani], 1964.
1964 COME; later issued as *Cistercian life*, 1974 MERT A
- d. *Monastic life at Gethsemani*. Trappist, Kentucky: Abbey of Gethsemani, 1965.
- e. Cassette tapes of Merton's classes to the novices of Gethsemani Abbey.

CASE 11:

Merton as Self-biographer and Journal Keeper

Merton kept a journal all his life. The "raw" entries would then be edited for publication. Included in this case are works published during Merton's life that were based on his journals, such as *The Sign of Jonas*, *Conjectures of a Guilty Bystander*, and *The Secular Journal of Thomas Merton*, that continue the story of his life begun in *The Seven Storey Mountain*. Since his death, many additional volumes of journals have been edited and published by others and are included here.

Journal material edited and published during Merton's lifetime:

- a. *The sign of Jonas*. London: Hollis & Carter, 1953.
1953 MERT A
- b. *The secular journal of Thomas Merton*. New York: Farrar, Straus & Cudahy, 1959.
1959 MERT
- c. *Thomas Merton's holographic journal #10: "The Red Diary" (1959; 1964-65)*. Courtesy of The Thomas Merton Center at Bellarmine University
- d. *Conjectures of a guilty bystander*. Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1966.
1966 MERT

Journal material edited and published after Merton's death:

- e. *Journals of Thomas Merton*. San Francisco, Calif.: HarperSanFrancisco, 1995-1998.
1995 MERT Volumes 1-7

CASE 12:

Journey to the Hermitage

Even before entering Gethsemani, Merton thought about living the life of a hermit. His years in Gethsemani only strengthened that desire. After traversing a long and difficult path, since Benedictine life is firmly centered on community, Merton was gradually permitted to embrace the lifestyle he desired. Because of health concerns, even after being permitted to live in the hermitage built for him

on the property of the Abbey, Merton still had to come to the Abbey every day for his main meal. He also invited many friends to visit him in his hermitage and so was never really isolated from the life of the world in his time. Several of his translations and original writings reveal his attraction to solitude.

a. *The wisdom of the desert*. Translated by Thomas Merton. New York: New Directions, 1960.

Merton's translation of some of his favorite Desert Father stories.

1960 MERT C

b. Guigo I, Prior of the Grande Chartreuse. *The solitary life*. Introduction and translation by Thomas Merton. [Trappist, Kentucky: Abbey of Gethsemani], 1963.

1963 GUIG

c. *The Solitary Life*. 1960. Autographed by Merton.

1960 MERT O

d. *The true solitude*. Kansas City, Missouri: Hallmark Editions, 1969.

1969 MERT B

CASE 13:

Bronze statue of Merton

Designed by David Kocka of Laconia, Indiana. Commissioned by Lisa Scherer in honor of her late husband, Bob Scherer, an alumnus of Bellarmine University, the school to which Merton chose to donate his papers upon his death. Acquired by Pitts Theology Library with the assistance of Jonathan Montaldo.

CASE 14:

Merton as Photographer

“Thomas Merton aimed for the image that was true to its subject and that had the mysterious ability to communicate fresh insights into it. His photographs began to reveal, in a way that nothing else did, certain aspects of his interior vision and his qualities as a man. His photographs were chosen not according to traditional canons of aesthetic beauty. He cared nothing for ‘the decisive moment’ or ‘the characteristic moment.’ He selected only the frames

that expressed his contemplative vision.” (Prologue to *A Hidden Wholeness: the Visual World of Thomas Merton* by John Howard Griffin)

a. Griffin, John Howard. *A hidden wholeness: the visual world of Thomas Merton*. Boston: Houghton, Mifflin, 1970.

1977 GRIF

b. Merton, Thomas. *Dialogues with silence: prayers and drawings*. San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 2001.

Besides his attraction to photography, Merton expressed his contemplative vision in simple line drawings. Jonathan Montaldo has published a good sampling of these in a compilation of Merton's prayers and drawings.

2001 MERT

CASE 15:

Journey to Activism

Merton's early life as a monk as revealed in his early prose writings is marked by his enthusiasm for tradition, his stark turning inward and awareness of his personal sinfulness. As he matured as a monk, this sort of stance began to soften and he became more and more aware of the pain being suffered in the world around him, in the Viet Nam War and the threat of nuclear war. This was especially true after experiencing a strong connection to all humanity in what is sometimes called his “Epiphany” on the corner of 4th and Walnut in Louisville on March 18, 1958. He found that he could not keep silent about what he saw. Merton supported the efforts of those like Dan and Phil Berrigan who protested constantly and at great personal cost against the Viet Nam war by writing about his own views on war. This eventually brought him into conflict with censors within his Order and church officials who did not want him to speak publicly on the issue. As he had done so often in the past, Merton found ways around the attempts at censure, for example, by distributing privately mimeographed copies to interested people.

a. *Cold War Letters*. Mimeographed, [1963].

1963 MERT C

b. *Peace in the post-Christian era*. Mimeographed. [1962].

1962 MERT D

c. *Original child bomb*. New York: New Directions, 1962.

1961 MERT D; autographed by Merton

d. *Seeds of destruction*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1964.

1964 MERT

e. *Faith and violence*. Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1968.

1968 MERT

CASE 16:

Journey to the Other Great Religions of the World

His own experience of contemplation and the search for God may have led Merton to desire to learn about and to reach out to contemplatives in other great world religions. He wanted to share his experience with other practitioners of contemplation and to learn from them while offering what he had to give. In the last few years of his life, Merton wrote about several religions or famous members of other religions such as Gandhi and Hinduism, Chuang Tzu and Taoism, but his greatest interest was devoted to the study of Zen Buddhism.

a. *The way of Chuang Tzu*. New York: New Directions, 1965.

1965 ZHUA

b. *Gandhi on non-violence*. Edited and introduction by Thomas Merton. New York: New Directions, 1965.

1965 GAND

c. *Mystics and Zen masters*. New York: Farrar, Strauss and Giroux, 1967.

1967 MERT

d. *Zen and the birds of appetite*. New York: New Directions, 1968.

1968 MERT B

e. *Thoughts on the East*. New York: New Directions, 1995.

1995 MERT C

f. *Merton and Sufism*. [1 article by Merton] Louisville, Ky.: Fons Vitae, 1999.

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CASE 17:

Merton and the Contemplative Nuns

Following Vatican Council II, the Roman Catholic nuns of the world were encouraged to go back to the founding documents of their various Orders and rethink the ways in which their religious life was being practiced in the 20th century. They were encouraged to purge customs that were stifling rather than aiding them in carrying out their charisms. Sisters in active Orders set about this task with gusto (perhaps with more gusto than the Council fathers had envisioned), but the contemplative nuns of the Church, isolated from the changes of the world, were finding the process of renewal more difficult to traverse. Thomas Merton was one of several people in the church who were in a position to help the nuns take on the task of renewal who stepped forward and offered whatever aid they could give. In 1967 and 1968 he called two groups of contemplative nuns from various Orders to Gethsemani for a retreat with him in the hopes of encouraging them to enter into the renewal of their religious lives.

a. *The springs of contemplation: a retreat at the Abbey of Gethsemani*. New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 1992.

1992 MERT

b. Photograph courtesy of Anita Wasserman, O.C.D. and the Discalced Carmelite Nuns of Cleveland, Ohio.

CASE 18:

The Journey to Asia

An important outgrowth of Merton's interest in Buddhism was his decision to attend an interfaith conference between Catholic religious and contemplatives of other major world religions in Bangkok, Thailand in December, 1968. He used the conference as an opportunity to travel more widely in the Far East, meeting with the Dalai Lama and other Tibetan Buddhists. He was also able to visit Polonnaruwa in Sri Lanka, site of colossal statues of the Buddha. This visit made a profound impression on Merton. He recorded the entire experience of the Asian trip in his journal. Years after his death, this journal, which he never had the chance to edit, was published as *The Asian Journal*.

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- a. *The Asian Journal of Thomas Merton*. New York: New Directions, 1973.
1973 MERT

CASE 19:

Merton on Christian Spirituality

During his career, Merton produced many volumes on Christian spirituality. Here is a sampling of those volumes.

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- a. *What is contemplation?* Holy Cross, Indiana: St. Mary's College, 1948.
1948 MERT
- b. *Seeds of Contemplation*. Norfolk, Conn.: New Directions, 1949.
1949 MERT D; signed by author; see also 1949 MERT
- c. *Basic principles of monastic spirituality*. [Trappist, Kentucky]: Abbey of Gethsemani, 1957.
1957 MERT
- d. *Thoughts in solitude*. New York: Farrar, Straus & Cudahy, 1958.
1961 MERT C; Baez copy; see also 1958 MERT
- e. *Spiritual direction and meditation*. Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press, 1960.
1960 MERT A

- f. *New seeds of contemplation*. New York: New Directions, 1961.
1961 MERT A

- g. *Contemplative prayer*. New York: Herder and Herder, 1969.
1969 MERT A

- h. *Contemplation in a world of action*. Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1971.
1971 MERT A

CASE 20:

Banner: Merton's Continuing Influence

Thomas Merton touched the lives of a multitude of people through his acts of sharing his life-journey and his thoughts on Christian spirituality by means of his writings. His influence did not end with his death. Scholars continue to ponder his ideas and draw inspiration from them. Some of their scholarship appears in *The Merton Seasonal*, a journal dedicated exclusively to the study of Merton. Others have produced biographies of Merton that have filled in some of the lacunae of his life not appearing in his autobiographical writings. Issues of *The Merton Seasonal* and some of the main biographies of Merton are gathered here.

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- a. *The Merton Seasonal*
1990 MERT C
- b. Rice, Edward. *The man in the sycamore tree*. Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1970.
- c. Hart, Patrick. *Thomas Merton, monk: a monastic tribute*. New York: Sheed and Ward, 1974.
- d. Mott, Michael. *The seven mountains of Thomas Merton*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1984
- e. Forest, Jim. *Living with wisdom: a life of Thomas Merton*. Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1991.
- f. Furlong, Monica. *Merton: a biography*. Ligouri, Missouri: Ligouri Publications, 1995.
- g. Cunningham, Lawrence. *Thomas Merton and the monastic vision*. Grand Rapids, Michigan: W.B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1999.
- h. Photograph courtesy of Jonathan Montaldo.

Merton timeline



1915, January 31, born in Prades France to Owen and Ruth Merton

1915, August, Merton family moves to U.S.A. because of WWI

1918, November 2, John Paul Merton born in New York

1921, October 21, Ruth Jenkins Merton dies of cancer

1922, moves to Bermuda with his father leaving John Paul with maternal grandparents

1923, Merton returns to Douglaston, Long Island to live with grandparents and brother

1925, Merton's father brings him to live with him in France

1926, Merton enrolled in the Lycee Ingres boarding school in Montauban, France

1928, Merton and his father move to England and he is enrolled in the Ripley Court school

1930, Merton enrolled in Oakham School where he becomes editor of the *Oakhamian* in 1931

1931, January 16, Owen Merton dies of a brain tumor, Tom Bennett, Owen's physician and former classmate in New Zealand becomes Merton's guardian

1931, Merton travels to Rome and Florence for a week, the beginning of his interest in Catholicism

1932, at Oakham, Merton acquires a scholarship to Clare College, Cambridge

1933, Merton enters Clare College but stays for only one year – it is possible he left because of fathering a child with a young woman (name unknown) while there

1935, January, Merton enters Columbia University as a sophomore

1935-1938, Merton wrote repeatedly for the *Columbia Jester*, the *Spectator*, the *Columbia Review*, and several other publications

1937, Merton served as editor of 1937 *Yearbook* and art director of the *Columbia Jester*

1937, Merton's interest in Catholicism strengthens on reading Etienne Gilson's *The Spirit of Medieval Philosophy*

1938, Merton graduates from Columbia with a B.A. in English, begins to work on M.A.

1938, August, Merton begins to attend Mass at Corpus Christi Church near the Columbia campus

1938, September, reading about Gerard Manley Hopkins's conversion to Catholicism and his decision to become a priest, Merton decides that he must do the same

1938, November 16, Merton was baptized a Catholic at Corpus Christi Church and received communion for the first time

1939, 22 February, receives M/A. in English from Columbia and decides to pursue a Ph.D., moves into Greenwich Village

1939, meets Dan Walsh who becomes one of his closest and lifelong friends

1939, May 29, Merton confirmed at Corpus Christi, and takes confirmation name James

1940-1941, Merton taught English at St. Bonaventure College in Olean, New York

1941, April, made a retreat during Holy Week at Our Lady of Gethsemani Abbey in Trappist, Kentucky and is immediately attracted to the place

1941, December 10, Merton goes to Gethsemani Abbey asking to enter, is accepted as a postulant by Dom Frederic Dunne on December 13

1942, March, 1st Sunday of Lent, Merton accepted as a novice

1942, June, Merton's Brother John Paul writes and informs him that is going to war and would visit Gethsemani before he left for Europe

Merton timeline (CONTINUED)



1942, July 17, Merton and John Paul meet, John Paul is baptized a Catholic on July 26 in New Haven, Kentucky and leaves the next day

1943, April 17, John Paul dies when his plane's engines fail over the English Channel

1943, Merton asked by his abbot to translate religious texts and write biographies of several Cistercian saints

1944, March 19, Merton makes temporary profession and receives the habit

1944, November, Merton's book *Thirty Poems* is published by New Directions

1946, New Directions publishes a second book of poems *A Man in the Divided Sea*, and this brings Merton recognition as a poet

1947, March 19, Merton makes his solemn profession

1948, *Seven Storey Mountain* is published to great critical acclaim

1949, January 5, Merton applies for U.S. citizenship

1949, May 26, Merton ordained a priest, publishes many volumes between 1949 and the end of his life

1951-1955, Merton serves as Master of Scholastics (those studying for the priesthood)

1955-1965, Merton serves as Master of Novices

1965-1968, lives as a hermit in a hermitage on the Abbey grounds

1968, December 10, Merton dies of apparent electrocution caused by touching an exposed wire on a fan, while in Bangkok, Thailand