

INTRODUCTION

ON AUGUST 21, 1957, Thomas Merton wrote to his friend and sometime typist Sr. Thérèse Lentfoehr¹ about a new set of novitiate conferences he was planning to send to her soon.

One reason why I have been late in starting my letters is that I had to preach the sermon for the feast of St Bernard. I like to prepare sermons but didn't get much chance this time. A brother novice has the notes at the moment but I will send them on to you when I get them back—with the other material I wanted to get you to type. I am so sorry I haven't been able to send this material along yet. It is a collection of conferences on the Liturgical Cycle, given to the novices. I want to go over the ms and make changes and corrections and have been waiting for a chance to do so since May. . . . I was going to try to get the liturgy notes to you by July 16. All I could do was pray for you as fervently as I could at Mass on your wonderful feasts. But the notes will be along soon, if I can get at them.²

Sr. Thérèse had typed the mimeographs for the six sets of “Monastic Orientation” notes compiled from Merton's time as master of students at the Abbey of Gethsemani, between 1951 and 1955,³ and was continuing to help out in this capacity now that Merton was the novice master at the

1. For a thorough presentation of this relationship as it developed over the course of two decades (1948–1968), see Nugent, *Thomas Merton and Thérèse Lentfoehr*.

2. Unpublished portion of August 21, 1957, letter from Thomas Merton to Thérèse Lentfoehr, SDS (archives of the Thomas Merton Center [TMC], Bellarmine University, Louisville, Kentucky); for the letter as published, see Merton, *Road to Joy*, 227–29.

3. See Merton's reference to her typing “the *last* series” of these notes in his October 22, 1955 letter to Sr. Thérèse announcing that he has become novice master (Merton, *Road to Joy*, 221); unpublished portions of this letter include further mention of “all this work over the past six years” (TMC archives). The first series of these notes actually predates Merton's appointment as master of students.

monastery, beginning in the fall of 1955. In return, she generally was able to keep the original copies for her extensive collection of Merton materials, which she assiduously preserved and carefully catalogued.⁴

On October 12, 1957, the conferences were finally mailed off: “It is ages since I got permission to send these Liturgy notes to you to be mimeographed,” Merton wrote. “I am finally doing so, having renounced the vain ambition of going through every one of them and correcting all that I wanted to. I think they will have to do as they stand. I hope there are no terrible errors, I don’t believe there are.”⁵ On November 10, a brief note accompanied what appears to be the return of some conferences that Sr. Thérèse had already typed and sent:

I rush this off to you with the notes, which I have gone over rather hurriedly but I am sure everything is fine. I think I have answered all your queries, if not just use your own judgement. I add one messy page I found—on the Exaltation of the Holy Cross. Hard to read but fortunately brief Note that I have spelled out a few words clearly—they are not supposed to be put in twice. I just made them clear for your sake: I hope I made them clear.⁶

Four days later, some additional conferences were sent, and a suggestion made about the organization of the material:

I enclose a few liturgy conferences that are not in the set I sent before. You can fit them in when you feel like it. Did I mention last time the idea that perhaps we could make two sets of notes, one for the “Time” and another for the “Saints”? That would make the whole business easier to manage. Unless you would want to mimeograph both sides of each sheet. Why not two volumes? It would be simpler.⁷

4. The material is now housed in the Rare Book and Manuscript Collection at Butler Library, Columbia University, New York City.

5. Unpublished portion of October 12, 1957, letter from Thomas Merton to Thérèse Lentfoehr, SDS (TMC archives); for the letter as published, see Merton, *Road to Joy*, 229.

6. Unpublished letter of November 10, 1957 from Thomas Merton to Thérèse Lentfoehr, SDS (TMC archives); this letter originally was dated simply “Nov 10,” without a year; “[1958]” was subsequently added in pencil, presumably not by Merton, as it is demonstrably erroneous, since by that date the final mimeographed version of the conferences had already been run off.

7. Unpublished letter of November 14, 1957 from Thomas Merton to Thérèse Lentfoehr, SDS (TMC archives).

Apparently the original order had been simply chronological, moving through the liturgical year sequentially and interspersing conferences on the successive celebrations of the liturgical seasons, running from the First Sunday of Advent through the Last Sunday after Pentecost, with those on the feasts of various saints attached to fixed days of the calendar, likewise running from late November through late November, corresponding to the cycle beginning with Advent. The change was made more to accommodate the bulk of the material, which would have been very large for a single mimeographed volume, than to distinguish between the temporal and the sanctoral cycles, but the result was to create a more coherent two-part work, now titled “Liturgical Feasts and Seasons,” though the “seasons” section comes first and the feast-day section second.

As 1958 arrived, Merton was still sending along additional material. On January 2 he wrote, “The liturgy notes haven’t showed up yet but there is no hurry at all. I am enclosing herewith a couple of pages of extra ‘feasts’ in longhand, alas.”⁸ But shortly afterward, Sr. Thérèse had evidently completed typing up the material—not as yet in mimeograph form, but as a regular typescript for Merton to check before she retyped the entire work on stencils,⁹ which would then be run off and distributed not only to the novices but to formation directors at other American Cistercian monasteries. On March 27, Merton wrote, “Months ago I got permission to write and send back the Liturgy notes, but everything has conspired to prevent me,”¹⁰ including illness, complications with some of the novices and various other writing tasks. In a postscript he added, “I am sending you some odds and ends for your collection. Nothing here needs to be typed,” but then he modifies that assurance: “The St Bernard sermon might however go in with the Liturgy notes for the feasts if you do not have it already. I don’t think you have the Epiphany notes either but you may not be able to read them so no matter, they are not important.”¹¹

8. Unpublished letter of January 2, 1958, from Thomas Merton to Thérèse Lentfoehr, SDS (TMC archives); the “extra” pages are probably the conferences on Sts. Simon & Jude, the Vigil of All Saints and the Feast of All Saints—one page each of handwritten material and the only items other than the single handwritten page on the Exaltation of the Holy Cross, already sent, that were not typed.

9. For Sr. Thérèse’s evident previous practice of making a separate typescript for Merton’s personal use, see his comment in an unpublished portion of his October 22, 1955, letter: “Oh, and by the way, don’t bother to type a special copy of the Sacred Art notes for me—please! The mimeographed copies are amply sufficient.”

10. Merton, *Road to Joy*, 229.

11. Unpublished portion of March 27, 1958, letter from Thomas Merton to Thérèse

On April 18 he wrote, “Take your time with the Liturgy notes,”¹² but evidently she had promptly gotten down to work on the final version, which had been completed, bound, and sent by midsummer, as Merton wrote on July 14: “I have not yet thanked you for the Liturgy Notes. The color is just right, and they are much appreciated. We have of course paid the bill for the binding, I did not have to tell you that. You should always send those bills here, they are our responsibility.” At the conclusion of the same lengthy letter he expressed his gratitude once again: “. . . thank you very much. Above all for the Liturgy Notes. I am gradually stopping all this note business so you won’t be bothered much longer with it. You have held up nobly, and I feel as usual guilty about burdening you.”¹³ Though he certainly was far from finished with “all this note business,” as most of the dozen different sets of monastic conferences composed during his years as novice master were presented in their final form and reproduced for distribution subsequent to “Liturgical Feasts and Seasons,” the rest were all typed up and multigraphed in-house by various novices over the years, so Sr. Thérèse was not in fact burdened with the task of typing them that she had performed so diligently for these notes.



The liturgy materials are unique among the various sets of novitiate conferences in that they were not presented regularly on a weekly (or even biweekly) basis over the course of months or even years as were Merton’s classes on various aspects of monastic history and practices.¹⁴ Rather they

Lentfoehr, SDS (TMC archives); the sermon is presumably the one he preached the previous August, mentioned in his August 21 letter; the Epiphany conference is probably the conference on Epiphany and Missions, the only item from the “Liturgical Feasts and Seasons” material sent by Merton to Sr. Thérèse that is not extant in the Lentfoehr collection at Columbia. Both these conferences are found in their proper place in the typescript Sr. Thérèse prepared for Merton before typing the stencils for the mimeograph, which may indicate that she already had copies of both at this time.

12. Unpublished portion of April 18, 1958 letter from Thomas Merton to Thérèse Lentfoehr, SDS (TMC archives); for the letter as published, see Merton, *Road to Joy*, 229–30.

13. Unpublished portions of July 14, 1958, letter from Thomas Merton to Thérèse Lentfoehr, SDS (TMC archives); for the letter as published, see Merton, *Road to Joy*, 230–31.

14. See Merton, *Cassian and the Fathers*; Merton, *Pre-Benedictine Monasticism*; Merton, *Introduction to Christian Mysticism*; Merton, *Rule of Saint Benedict*; Merton, *Monastic Observances*; Merton, *Life of the Vows*; Merton, *Charter, Customs*,

would have been given on occasions corresponding to the specific liturgical celebrations being considered. He began the series for Advent 1955, almost immediately after becoming novice master, appending the date November 25, 1955, to “The Opening of the Liturgical Year” (301–9), written as an introduction for what was evidently already projected as a comprehensive set of reflections. On the verso side of the last of the five pages of this original typescript, he jotted down possible topics for “Further Advent Conferences”—including “Sat Dec 3—St John Baptist in Advent Liturgy (Lit of 2nd and 3rd Sundays)” which was indeed written (9–13); “Wed Dec 7 Something for Immac Conception,” which probably corresponds to a two-page handwritten “Feast of the Immaculate Conception—Some themes from the office” (375–77); an undated, parenthetical “(The Advent Ember Days + O Antiphons ?)” —both the former (13–15) and the latter (18–24) are included in the conferences; “Sun Dec 18—Cistercian Xmas Sermons—or something on the Incarnation”—the latter presumably the four-page typescript “The Mystery of the Incarnation” (24–30), while there is no evidence that the former was composed; “Dec 30. Friday—conf. on Christmas Liturgy” which probably became “The Christmas Liturgy—The 3 Masses” (30–37); a separate section on “Conferences after Christmas” concludes with “Thurs Epiphany Liturgy,” which probably became the three-page handwritten “The Office of the Epiphany of Our Lord” (48–51).

There are no further notes of this kind specifying particular dates for conferences, but presumably the bulk of the material for both the temporal and sanctoral cycles was presented during the course of 1956. Evidently the two earliest dated conferences were actually presented before the introduction was completed: the conference on “The Dedication of the Church” (291–95), celebrated at Gethsemani on November 15, is dated “1955” on the typescript; even earlier was the conference on St. Martin of Tours (285–87), a handwritten page dated “Nov. 11 1955.” The conference titled “Monastic Peace” (267–71) is specified as “F. of St Luke, 1956”; the handwritten “Notes for the Feast of the Presentation” (of Mary) (295–300) are dated “1956”; “Further Advent Notes” (16–18) are parenthetically dated “1956”—thus belonging to a second year of conferences begun with Advent the year before. The conference on the Feast of St. Benedict (186–89) is dated 1957; as indicated in Merton’s

Constitutions; Merton, *Cistercian Fathers and Their Monastic Theology*; Merton, *Medieval Cistercian History*; Merton, *Monastic Introduction to Sacred Scripture*; Merton, *Notes on Genesis and Exodus*.

correspondence with Sr. Thérèse, the sermon for the Feast of St. Bernard (240–43) was apparently given in 1957 (August 20),¹⁵ as well as the conference on the Exaltation of the Holy Cross, celebrated on September 14 (250–51). The brief notes on the Circumcision (47–48) are among the latest materials, since they are found written below jottings that include mention of “1958 Common Work”; evidently the material on Epiphany and Missions (52–54) mentioned in his March 27, 1958, letter (the only material not extant in Merton’s own version) also comes from that year. For those feasts that have more than one conference devoted to them, presumably they come from successive years. But since the major part of the material had been sent to Sr. Thérèse by mid-October 1957, it is clear that almost all of the “Liturgical Feasts and Seasons” mimeograph had been composed between November 1955 and that date, with the Epiphany notes of January 1958 evidently being the last conference to be included.



The textual development of *Liturgical Feasts and Seasons* is rather more complicated than that of other sets of Merton’s monastic conferences. There are five versions of the materials, all of which contribute to some degree to the critical text of the present edition. (For a list of the versions of each of the individual conferences, see Appendix A [381–90].)

The first (designated TMa here), housed in the archives of the Thomas Merton Center at Bellarmine University in Louisville, Kentucky, is composed solely of typescripts and handwritten pages produced by Merton himself and used by him in delivering the conferences to the novices. What is quickly apparent is that this collection includes only part of the materials that eventually were included in the “Liturgical Feasts and Seasons” mimeograph: only twelve of fifty-five items found in Part I and twenty-four of forty-five items found in Part II. The major reason for these gaps becomes apparent when the second version of the material (designated TMb) is examined. It is clear that many of the items found here and missing in TMa were also part of Merton’s original reading typescripts, pages which he sent to Sr. Thérèse for retyping, leaving him without copies at the monastery. What is more puzzling is that TMa also

15. It is dated 1958 on the typescript, but this is clearly in error as it is mentioned in Merton’s letter of March 27 of that year, long before the feast on August 20, by which time the final mimeograph of the entire set of conferences had been run off.

includes thirty-four items that are not found in the final mimeographed “Liturgical Feasts and Seasons.” Some of this material is slight and may have been purposely excluded. One item, for Monday of the Second Week of Lent (346), is actually written on a fragmentary piece of paper and can be assigned to its proper day only by identifying it through its lectionary readings. Some of the material, which was probably assembled in its present form not by Merton himself but at some point well after his death by longtime Merton Center director Robert E. Daggy, is loosely associated at best with the liturgical year, and one item, on the chapter of faults (326–28), is probably included only because it was filed along with material on spiritual direction associated with the Epiphany (321–26), which is itself an early version of the first two parts of “Spiritual Direction in the Monastic Setting,” included as an Appendix to the *Monastic Observances* conferences.¹⁶ But it seems likely that many if not most of these items were omitted inadvertently, misplaced, or perhaps forgotten when Merton was assembling the disparate materials to send to Sr. Thérèse. Even some of the relatively short items would fill in gaps in the mimeographed series, such as the notes for Passion Sunday (349–50), the Monday after Easter (353–55), Low Sunday (356–57) and the Third Sunday after Easter (357–59). Given the Marian focus of so much of the material in the final version, which includes conferences on even relatively minor Marian feasts, it seems inconceivable that Merton would have excluded material on the Feast of the Immaculate Conception if it had been readily accessible (no less than three separate conferences on the feast, one of which is quite substantial, are part of TMA [367–77]). Likewise a major discussion of “Jesus in the Lenten Gospels” (333–45) would seem very unlikely to have been left out on purpose. However “The Opening of the Liturgical Year,” certainly one of the major pieces of writing in the whole collection, was evidently considered significant enough by Merton to publish it in slightly revised form as an article titled “Time and the Liturgy” in 1956,¹⁷ which is no doubt the reason why it was omitted from the mimeographed text of “Liturgical Feasts and Seasons,” despite its singular relevance and

16. See Merton, *Monastic Observances*, 255–61.

17. There are about a dozen minor alterations in this published text, the most extensive being the addition of a single sentence (8) quoting the secret from the ninth Sunday after Pentecost after the sentence: “By the liturgy, while remaining in time, we enter into the great celebration that takes place before the throne of the Lamb in heaven, in eternity” (307). This article was much more heavily revised for its inclusion in Merton, *Seasons of Celebration*, 45–60: see below, pages xlii–xliv.

importance in providing a general orientation to the rest of the material that was originally intended to follow it. All these items uniquely present in TMa, for the sake of completeness even those arguably not originally intended by Merton to form part of the liturgy conferences, are included in the present edition in a section of “Additional Materials” following Parts I and II, rearranged slightly from the order in which they appear in the Merton Center collection, roughly following the liturgical calendar but not separated into temporal and sanctoral cycles.

The second version of the text (Tmb), now part of the Lentfoehr collection at the Columbia University Library, begins with a title page handwritten by Merton that reads: “LITURGICAL / FEASTS / AND / SEASONS / conferences given in the Choir Novitiate / Abbey of Gethsemani.” It includes every item found in the final mimeograph except the conference on Epiphany and Missions, which was apparently mislaid by Sr. Thérèse at some point and not filed with the rest of the material. For those items not found in TMa this version carries the primary textual authority. For those items present in both versions, it might seem that the later versions found in Tmb would have the greater authority, but a comparison of the two texts reveals that in many cases the Tmb version is inferior to that of TMa, particularly for those items in TMa that were handwritten by Merton and were subsequently typed before being sent to Sr. Thérèse. It is evident that these typed copies were not made by Merton himself but presumably by one of the novices, Merton’s typical practice for most of his novitiate conferences,¹⁸ because occasionally the typist misreads Merton’s difficult handwriting and introduces errors into the Tmb text which are then transmitted to Sr. Thérèse’s own typescript (designated TL) and subsequently to the mimeograph version. While Merton frequently introduces authorial alterations in the Tmb text before it is sent to Sr. Thérèse, more often the differences between the two texts are the result of scribal error. Therefore determining the proper reading for each particular discrepancy is necessary in establishing what Merton actually intended.

18. For the textual witnesses to the other published sets of conferences, see Merton, *Cassian and the Fathers*, liv–lxi; Merton, *Pre-Benedictine Monasticism*, lxii–lxv; Merton, *Introduction to Christian Mysticism*, liii–lv; Merton, *Rule of Saint Benedict*, lvi–lix; Merton, *Monastic Observances*, l–liii; Merton, *Life of the Vows*, lxxiv–lxxviii; Merton, *Charter, Customs, Constitutions*, xvi–xvii, xxii, xxx–xxxii, lvii–lix; Merton, *Cistercian Fathers*, lv–lvii, lxxx–lxxxiii, cviii–cix; Merton, *Medieval Cistercian History*, xv–xx, l–li; Merton, *Monastic Introduction to Sacred Scripture*, xi–xiii; Merton, *Notes on Genesis and Exodus*, lv–lvi.