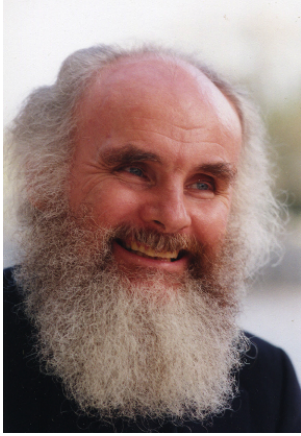


# The Eradication of Thomas Merton: Strike Three in 1968

By Fr. Emmanuel Charles McCarthy



*"You cannot honestly speak the truth with love,  
if you will not honestly search for the truth with love."  
-EMC*

Rev. Emmanuel Charles McCarthy

**O**n December 11, 1968 at about 6 P.M. I was sitting sipping coffee in the south cafeteria of the University of Notre Dame. While perusing the South Bend Tribune, I noticed a small item on one of the inner pages. It read that Thomas Merton, the Trappist monk, had died in Bangkok, Thailand. My first, immediate and total reaction to this detail-devoid story was, "He was murdered." And, that has been my perception of his death ever since.

It would take someone with literary talent well beyond my pedestrian abilities to communicate, to those who were not living at the time, the enormity of Thomas Merton stature and influence among Catholics in the U.S. at the moment of his murder. In its own way, his power to affect consciousnesses and consciences was as significant as that possessed by two other anti-war prophets struck down in 1968, Martin Luther King, Jr. and Robert F. Kennedy.

Beginning with his 1948 autobiography, *The Seven Storey Mountain*, his books were part of the normal furnishings of every Catholic home. To say that in the 1940s and 1950s he was read by Catholic more than they read the Bible would be an understatement. Perhaps, Bishop Fulton J. Sheen was an equivalent fixture in Catholic households, at least on their TVs on Tuesday evenings. But no other bishop, priest, theologian or spiritual writer so entered into the Catholic mind of those living in those decades as the Trappist monk Merton and the Emmy Award winning Bishop Sheen.

One of the differences between the two was that while Bishop Sheen denounced the Vietnam War as immoral and unjust even before the Catonsville 9 draft file burnings, and told the President in a private letter made public to get out of Vietnam immediately, he contextualized his denunciation exclusively in terms of the morality of Catholic Just War Theory. Merton's denunciation, while also dependent on Catholic Just War Theory, was contextualized quite

differently. He did not primarily “focus on individual violence, on the rare instance of hand to hand combat, but on the real problem of war, which is death and even genocide as big business: a white-collar murder machine, the systematically organized bureaucratic and technological destruction of human beings for profit.” This was an understanding of war to which the popular Catholic mind, the mind so enamored of Thomas Merton, never had access before.

Catholics were about sixty million in the U.S. at the time and composed nearly half of the U.S. military. Added to this was the fact that Merton’s anti-Vietnam War literary reach extended far, far beyond Catholics. By any worldly standard he was “an enemy of the state.” This the very title which he gave his essay on Franz Jagerstatter—and like Franz Jagerstatter he was dealt with accordingly. That was my understanding within a minute of reading about his death on December 11, 1968 and that has remained my understanding to this day.

This was, however, a position for which few if any in the Catholic peace movement or in the Church agreed. In 1968 this near universal agreement that Merton’s death was a fluke accident made no sense to me, as it makes no sense to me today. There was a Protestant minister from Grand Rapids, Michigan, who in the seventies wrote two articles questioning the fluke accident story of Merton’s death that I saw, but no one in the Catholic community that I saw or heard ventured down that path. Indeed, whenever I explicitly raised the issue it was brushed off as either just more conspiracy speculation—like Oswald didn’t kill Kennedy or James Earl Ray didn’t kill King—or else as an issue that was long ago settled.

Then, starting a little while after his death, stories began to appear in the Catholic press and other places regarding his difficulties living the monastic life. The first of these that I saw was in the Pilot, the weekly paper of the Archdiocese of Boston. A long-time columnist for the paper wrote an insidious little screed on Merton’s conflicts with the authority/power structure of the Monastery, i.e. the Abbot. The point of his article was that people should not be holding the guy up as a spiritual guru when he could not even properly manage his own life in his chosen vocation. This was just the first snowball with a rock inside of it thrown. In time, it would become an avalanche of ad hominem attacks against Thomas Merton. Yet, not a flake of thought contradicting the official narrative of his death could get a hearing in the Catholic press or the Christian peace press for fifty years.

In 2018, the fiftieth year after his death that began to change with the publication of *The Martyrdom of Thomas Merton* by two independent investigative reports, Hugh Turley and David Martin—or so I thought. I wrote a review of it, which I sent out to my various email lists. A segment of that review reads as follows:

“I have read this book cover to cover with pencil in hand in order to make detailed notations. I guarantee it is a solid presentation of the logically unbridgeable abyss between the physical evidence that is available for anyone to examine and the official story put out by the U.S. Government and the Church regarding Thomas Merton's death. What concerns me is not that the U.S. government had a hand in Merton's death and the cover-up that followed.

Clandestinely murdering innocent people is the ordinary modus operandi of all major governments all the time. What concerns me is that the leadership of the institutional Church acquiesced to a narrative regarding the death of one of its own, which narrative cannot be sustained, indeed is in contradiction to the evidence. Of course, maybe the leadership of the institutional Church did not see Merton as one of its own but rather saw him as a hair shirt of truth to which they were glad to say, ever so piously of course, ‘Good riddance.’”

I waited to see the reviews of it in the Catholic and secular press, which I anticipated being very positive since the book’s presentation of the evidence and logic contradicting the hitherto enshrined account of the cause of Thomas Merton’s bizarre death was impeccable.

However, few reviews, positive or negative, were forthcoming. I could understand why corporate mass media would suppress knowledge of the book and its content by not reviewing it. After all, Merton in his writings had eviscerated the myths that corporate mass media propagates about itself and exposed the lies by which it lives better than anyone I have ever read. But why did the Catholic press refuse to even acknowledge this book with at least negative reviews, which would reveal its evidentiary and logical flaws? To this day in 2020 I have found only two reviews of the book, one in an independent Catholic weekly in western Canada and another in an independent secular website in the U.S.

In the New Testament “the world” in the pejorative sense lives in the reign of Satan. In modern language “the world” in the pejorative sense is called “the real world.” It is the totally perishable world in which normalized murder, deceit, hate, greed, envy, lust for power over others, betrayal, indifference to the suffering of others, revenge, etc. are rampant and organized by the few to oppress and control as many of their fellow homo sapiens as possible. In the “real world” deception by censorship is a universal practice.

For example, *The Soliloquy of King Leopold* by Mark Twain, relentlessly lays out the ceaseless and extraordinary raw evil in which the King and the people of Belgium with the help from the U.S. were engaged in the Congo, in order to make themselves a highly cultured, civilized and Christian jewel among the nations of Europe. Mark Twain just because he was Mark Twain got *The Soliloquy of King Leopold* published and it sold out quickly. People were outraged about what was taking place. However, Twain nor anyone else could not get it into a second printing in the U.S. or Europe for another fifty years! This was the old deception by censorship by the elites from at least the time of the ancient Greeks as a most useful tool in their bag of deceptions. The gigantic literary status of Mark Twain at the time or thereafter meant zero to those who owned the presses. They had something that the rulers needed hidden from people and censorship of his book was the easiest and quickest way to hide it.

So, it was in the beginning and is now with the death of Thomas Merton. One book, *The Martyrdom of Thomas Merton*, in fifty years looks at the evidence on which the official cause of death of a world-renowned monk and priest is predicated and that book is censored out of consciousness by those who own and control the secular media and Catholic media. Why? And, what possesses good people who railed against censorship all their adult lives to suddenly

ignore censorship, approve of it and participate in it, when some cause or truth they espouse employs it? These are not incidental concerns for anyone who desires to follow the Nonviolent Jesus of the Gospels and His Way of Nonviolent Love of friends and enemies. Why?

The answer should be obvious to anyone who ponders the Gospels. Jesus explicitly teaches “You belong to your father, the devil, and you want to carry out your father's desires. He was a murderer from the beginning, not holding to the truth, for there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks his native language, for he is a liar and the father of lies” (Jn 8:44). When lying by censorship or by any other means becomes an accepted dimension of one’s own modus operandi, he or she—regardless of the justice of their cause—has parted company with Jesus, with the Holy, and joined “the world” in the pejorative sense, the so-called “real world.” This is “the world” Jesus came to put an end to, and His Way for ending its rule over human life was not to put an end to it by participating in its lying and killing.

I hope you will take the time to read *The Martyrdom of Thomas Merton*, if for no other reason than to acquire a deeper and more accurate awareness of the extent and depth of the hold that the power of evil has on homo sapiens regardless of the religion to which they belong, the politics with which they affiliate, the culture and country in which they live, or the economic class with which they associate. To hopefully motivate you to read this book on Thomas Merton's bizarre death, I am attaching this recent video/audio interview with one of the authors of the book, Hugh Turley. If this does not move you to read *The Martyrdom of Thomas Merton* then, perhaps nothing under the sun will. But, a Christian’s lack of interest in seeing a possible truth that he or she does not want to see, does not change the spiritual and moral fact that the search for truth is integral, not incidental, to living and loving as Jesus lived and loved, to being faithful to His “new commandment.”

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ImdRuSg3dJk&feature=emb\\_logo](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ImdRuSg3dJk&feature=emb_logo)

-Emmanuel Charles McCarthy  
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