Although many of Thomas Merton's writings have now been published in the years since he died in 1968, The Inner Experience has remained officially unpublished in accordance with his wishes expressed in the Merton Legacy agreement drawn up in 1967. Merton apparently did not want the book published, even after his death. The reason given for its publication now is twofold: despite prohibiting publication in book form, Merton strangely but characteristically allowed excerpts of the book to be published thereby effectively undermining the ban on publication. The text has been available for some time now, albeit dispersed in various books and journals. Its publication now is justified by way of offering a complete and authorised version of the text. A second reason given is that Merton in 1967 prohibited further revisions to the text and had begun to circulate it with a view to formal permission for its publication. He gave it to Dan Walsh and wondered what the response would be if it was published. Dan Walsh gave it to some Carmelite Sisters—and they thought he was right. It wasn't ready and because Merton said things I didn't agree with, it made me think things through and enter into a dialogue in a way which I would not have done if the book had been better constructed or better written, or had not offended my sensibilities. Typical Merton.

So The Inner Experience should come with a health warning—which it does really. It is not a book that I would necessarily have chosen to read but it is one that I am glad I have read. As Merton himself says, you may even find yourself having to read the thing whether it fits in with your plans or not. Those who have not read any Merton before should not begin here—but better to start with his journals The Sign of Jonas. Those who want to learn more about the contemplative life would be better advised to get hold of Merton's New Seeds of Contemplation. Merton did not want The Inner Experience published, and I think he was right. It wasn't ready and he knew it. I would not have published it—but I am grateful for its publication now!