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## Merton and Hinduism: The Yoga of the Heart

David M. Odorisio, editor

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Thomas Merton, like the proverbial fox, rambled across much terrain and in such roaming saw and revealed much about a variety of challenging subjects. Merton was not the only Roman Catholic in the 20<sup>th</sup> century to see and articulate the need for deeper interfaith contemplative dialogue, but he was certainly one of the most evocative, accessible and articulate voices in so doing. The publisher Fons Vitae, to their courageous and hard-won credit, deserve many plaudits for bringing together, in a splendid collection of volumes, the landscape that Merton, fox-like, traversed.<sup>7</sup> But, Merton was also very much like the hedgehog, burrowing deeper and gleaning much wisdom from such burrowing. The latest and final text on Merton and his contemplative interfaith dialogue, *Merton and Hinduism: The Yoga of the Heart*, edited by David M. Odorisio, is a beauty and bounty not to be missed.

*Merton and Hinduism* starts with David Odoriso's lengthy and incisive introduction, the path and direction of the book made plain and clear for the curious and interested reader. Part I, 'Hinduism and Christianity in Context: Historical and Comparative Perspectives', threads together six superb essays that reflect on Merton, Hinduism and Yoga, three of the essays exploring the parallels between yoga and hesychasm. This provides a general overview of the larger topic of Christianity and Hinduism, Merton more in the shadows and offstage. Part II, 'Merton and Hinduism: Dialogue and Deep Learning in the Cave of the Heart', has thirteen essays that explore Merton's varied engagement with forms of Hinduism from a variety of angles, including his friendship with different scholars and practitioners of Hinduism. Part III, 'Merton on Hinduism: The Yoga of the Heart', for the most part, includes ten articles by Merton on Hinduism. These include occasional articles, a book review, a letter and his tribute to Ghandi. Also included are transcriptions of his monastic conferences on Hinduism and Yoga. Part IV, 'Appendix: Reading Thomas Merton Reading Hinduism and Yoga: A Bibliography of Sources', a fitting ending for those keen to delve deeper and further into Merton's burrowing and probes. The book also includes several photographs, including six taken by Merton during his visit to India in 1968.

David M. Odoriso has walked the extra mile not only to synthesize material that many may already be aware of by Merton, but he has also brought to light much that has previously not been available, not least the transcriptions of his talks. This makes *Merton and Hinduism* a rich vein of sources and ideas that will set new standards for further studies on Merton on Hinduism, Indian religion and the East. Many of the essays in *Merton and Hinduism* have been published before but the bringing together of such articles into a polished and needful tome makes this a must read text for Merton scholars. I was fortunate, when younger, to correspond with Bede Griffiths and I was somewhat disappointed there was not an article that dealt with Merton and Griffiths in a more comprehensive way. Griffiths was the more mature and deeper thinker than Merton on Hinduism. An article on Merton, Griffiths and Hinduism could have revealed much about both Merton's fox-like approach and, at times, his lack of depth. Although Paul Dekar's article on Merton and Gandhi covers much needed terrain, Merton, in many ways, had more affinities with Tagore than Gandhi — the book includes a fine photograph of Coomaraswamy and Tagore. In short, an essay on Merton and Tagore just as an article on Merton and Griffiths would have enriched and fleshed out this timely volume on Merton's explorations into the Indian and

Hindu soul.

A small yet significant quibble I have about this expansive book is the lack of an index which would have made it possible to navigate more easily topics, themes and people that interest the curious reader. But this is but a misstep in an otherwise superb book.

There is no doubt that Fons Vitae and David M. Odorisio have excelled in articulating Merton's fox-like traversing of the terrain of Hinduism. As mentioned above, Merton did do his hedgehog-like burrowing, but to nothing like the extent or depth of writers such as Griffiths. And yet *Merton and Hinduism* brilliantly illuminates the compelling reality that Merton's questioning mind ranged over so widely, ever burrowing into the depths. This will be the standard source book for future studies on Merton and Hinduism.

\* There are nine volumes in the Fons Vitae series of Merton's engagement with other religious traditions: Sufism, Hesychasm, Judaism, the Protestant Tradition, Buddhism, the Tao, Indigenous Wisdom, Confucianism, and Hinduism.

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