

Daily Meditation 6-02-25 Matthew Returns

Good morning.

In my daily meditations today, I thanked Gianluigi (G.G.) and the team for carrying along in my temporary absence while I was working on my book on John of the Cross.

Now this past week, G.G. did a series of very fine meditations on Thomas Merton, including my book on Thomas Merton. And we referred to the death of Thomas Merton, which has always been very suspect. And he gave my opinion that Merton was murdered. So I'd like to explore more about that topic, because for Merton to be murdered means he was martyred. And in the Christian tradition, that's a pretty big thing. Now I have a couple of stories to tell, and to introduce you, if you don't know them already, to two books that have come out recently about this very topic.

My first story goes back, oh, I don't know, 25 years ago when I met a CIA agent who was active in Southeast Asia. At the time, Merton was, well, died suddenly three hours after giving a talk at a retreat for fellow monks outside of Bangkok in Thailand. And I asked this CIA agent who was there, "did you people kill Thomas Merton?" And he said, "I'll neither affirm it nor deny it."

Now he could just as easily said, "No, we didn't," or "we did," or "maybe we did." But he gave that answer, which is a bit suspect in itself.

Okay, 10 years later, a student of mine who had heard me talk about this, asked another CIA agent who was there at the time, Southeast Asia, the same question, "did you people kill Merton?" And this is what he said to her. He said, "At that time, we in the CIA were wallowing in cash, wallowing in cash," (this was at the height of the Vietnam War) "and there was no accountability. If anyone, at that time in the CIA, in that time, in that area, had wanted Merton killed, had thought he was dangerous to American interests, he could have had it done with no questions asked."

No questions asked. So that was another response to the question.

And then number of years later, when my book came out, just a couple months after my book on Merton came out, I met a person who was a young man in the CIA at the time of Merton's death, and working in that area. And I asked him, "did you people kill Thomas Merton?" And he said to me, "yes." And he said, "The last 40 years of my life, I've been

trying to cleanse my conscience of the work I did for the CIA in Southeast Asia 40 years ago.”

Now, for the first time, I’m going to tell you who this person was, because I’ve never identified him, because he is now deceased. It was, in fact, the Episcopal Archbishop of Los Angeles, Bishop John Bruno. And it was at a conference that he invited me to lead, because their lead speaker got sick last minute, and they called me in. So I gave a talk, and afterwards, we were at a table with about eight other people, and that is where this subject came out. And I learned that he was in the CIA as a young man. So I would call that a pretty reliable source.

Now I want to bring to your attention two books: the first called *The Martyrdom of Thomas Merton, An Investigation* by Hugh Turley and David Martin. And this came out in, we double checked the date, 2018. And then a follow up book that came out more recently, is called by the same authors, came out in 2023, by Hugh Turley and David Martin, called *Thomas Merton's Betrayers: The Case Against Abbot James Fox and author John Howard Griffin*.

You see, the story was put out immediately after his death, that he had been taking a shower and had it was a very abstract kind of guy, a goofus of some kind, who, soaking wet, plugged his fan into the room and was electrocuted and died from that. But it does not add up at all. First of all, I’ve seen the film of his last talk, in other words, at this retreat center in Bangkok. And it was not a flimsy building, it was a brand new building, and the monks had been there for several days, and I’m sure he had been plugging in his fan every day, it being a hot area, especially in December, and it didn’t electrocute him.

Furthermore, we have pictures taken by four people who discovered the body, three of them monks and one of them a nun, who was in fact, a doctor, an MD. And they all said that it was suspect. The body was laid out so carefully, they felt it was a “scene” that had been created, and the fan was on top of the body.

But, and this, to me, is the most important evidence: There was blood coming out of his neck, the back of his neck. And they sent me pictures, of these two pictures, which the abbey had forbidden to be seen by anybody. And you can see the blood coming out of the back of the neck. Well, that’s not what happens in an electrocution. There’s not bleeding.

So you can read these two books yourselves, but the evidence is there. There is so much cover-up, including from the Thai police, who, of course, were under a lot of pressure from the American military, who were around, etc, etc. And of course, this cover-up by

the abbey, which spread the news in a lot of Catholic journals, that Thomas Merton died of electrocution, plugging the fan in.

And so I want to share with you a few observations from the second book. And it goes through the cover-up, because, as they say, *We believe we have shown, to the satisfaction of almost any objective person, that Merton was assassinated. The assassination would have involved a great deal of planning. An important part of the planning would have been the planning of the cover-up.*

Well, there was this cover up. It was in the press and bought hook-line-and sinker by the Catholic press, and the monastery had a lot to do with it. Now, because the abbot there, James Fox, put out this story almost immediately, that he was electrocuted by a faulty wire and a large electric fan, and there was no autopsy done. Now, the abbot could have had an autopsy done when the body came back to the monastery, but he did not do that. That would have answered all these questions.

But I myself am not as hard on the abbey and abbot as are the authors are, for this reason: My friend Jose Hobday, a Franciscan sister, she was one of a large family of Native Americans, she was the youngest and the only girl in the family, but there were nine children, eight of them boys. All except one was killed in wars, Second World War, Korean War, and Vietnam. And her one brother, who was not killed, was a very brilliant scientist working on a stealth bomber in Kansas. And she got a call one day from a general saying, "your brother is dead, do not investigate."

Jose, who is a very sturdy and strong woman. I've never seen her afraid of anything -- she was afraid, and she got into her car and disappeared for two weeks. My suspicion is that someone at the Abbey got a very similar phone call when Merton died, saying something like, "don't investigate." And I think that the abbot made a decision that it was better for the overall survival of the monastery, that they not investigate.

Remember, that was the same year, in 1968, that Robert Kennedy was murdered, and Martin Luther King Jr was murdered. And of course, Merton had come out against the Vietnam War even before Martin Luther King Jr did, and they were very close friends. And Merton was coaching the Berrigan brothers about how to escape the FBI and CIA, as they were running from being imprisoned for their objection to the war.

So there's a lot here in these two books, and I think there's a lot in my stories. And it doesn't mean the CIA has not evolved and improved since that time, 1968. There were the Church investigations by Senator Church in the Senate that were good and solid. And this is not the CIA of 2025. But nevertheless, there is important information here. Did

Thomas Merton die a martyr for his protest against the Vietnam War? I think the evidence is there to see.

Thank you. We'll see you next week.