

Thomas Merton Meets the Unspeakable: Rendezvous in Thailand

Jerome Donovan

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Thomas Merton Meets the Unspeakable is a concise presentation of the facts and events surrounding Merton's death.

The 1960s were grim, marked by the assassinations of prominent activists, peacemakers, and politicians. In *Thomas Merton Meets the Unspeakable*, Jerome Donovan makes a case for adding the name of spiritual leader, poet, and author Thomas Merton to that list.

The book traces Merton's conflicted life from his difficult childhood and rather wild, worldly youth to his decision to commit to the austere life of a Trappist monk. It follows him as he claims a place on the world stage as a writer and spiritual leader and reveals Merton's anti-war stance at a time when the United States was mired in the bloody, protracted, and increasingly unpopular Vietnam War.

Culminating with Merton's fateful 1968 trip to Thailand to participate as featured speaker at a religious conference, the book reveals the strange circumstances surrounding his supposedly accidental death and the odd events that followed the discovery of his body. These gave rise to assertions that Merton was assassinated by an American administration determined to silence his anti-war message. A 2013 visit to the site of Merton's death helped to convince Donovan that the assassination theory is valid.

Linked by its title to Merton's own work, which defined "unspeakable" as "the unexpressed mendacity that undergirds the true objective of our wars and dreams of international dominance," the book affirms that Merton had a deeper awareness of the real, hidden purpose of America's wars and was unafraid to make that knowledge public.

In writing that builds emotional tension organically without resorting to hyperbole or making open accusations, the book reveals Merton not only as a spiritual icon but as a man who struggled with inner conflicts throughout his life. The case it makes for the assassination theory is concise, compelling, and research-based.

Well-calibrated pacing and a pointed yet conversational tone add to the book's emotional intensity and enhance reader engagement. Donovan's assertions are made more compelling by his list of Merton's contacts and friendships with prominent anti-war activists, including Catholic peace activist Dorothy Day, Vietnamese pacifist monk Thich Nhat Hahn, and singer Joan Baez. The book notes that Martin Luther King, Jr. intended to meet with Merton right before his own death.

Thomas Merton Meets the Unspeakable is a concise presentation of the facts and events surrounding Merton's death and a moving call for justice for a beloved spiritual leader who stood for the truth no matter the cost.

KRISTINE MORRIS (April 25, 2019)

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