"subsequently cited as Exx." — sometimes without any further reference to the Spiritual Exercises in the chapter in question. Besides the Bloom citation, there are several 'duplicate' references (without any indication that the author or passage has been cited previously). More serious is the citation of George Aschenbrenner’s classic article on the consciousness examen on page 82. The text would suggest, incorrectly, that Aschenbrenner supports Sheldrake’s argument against fixed times for prayer. In fact, pages 82 and 83 might give the impression that St. Ignatius also does so in his 19th annotation (the source of what is known today as the retreat in daily life), whereas Ignatius explicitly suggests a daily period of one and a half hours for prayer.

The inaccuracies just noted are particularly unfortunate, since they appear in one of the better chapters of the book: chapter 6, "Time and Times for Prayer". What Sheldrake says about flexibility is solid and helpful. It might be wise, though, to read the final section of the chapter (pp. 87-90) first, in order to place the discussion of flexibility in proper perspective. In general, the best sections are those which are pastoral and experiential. When Sheldrake speaks of his own experience, as a pray-er and as a director (for example, in addition to chap. 6, in chap. 2, "A Humane Holiness"; 5, "Prayer and Images of God"; and 8, "Imagination and Prayer"), he has much pastoral wisdom to share with us. For example, on page 69 he says: "We need to be convinced that God can and does meet us where we are, is infinitely patient and waits for us. This belief may itself be reinforced by using for prayer scripture passages that speak of God’s faithfulness and accepting love, such as the psalms or passages from Isaiah. What words, phrases or images most strike me? I can remain with them, repeat them or merely focus on them and allow their positive power to go deeper until they fill my consciousness." Such advice can only come from one’s own experience — and it echoes the experience of anyone who has sought to come to a personal knowledge (a knowledge of the heart and not merely of the head) of the Lord. It is in speaking of such experiential matters that Sheldrake is at his best.

Thomas H. Green, S.J.


While reading the spiritual diary of Thomas Merton, this reviewer was frequently struck by conflicting impressions, sometimes positive and sometimes negative, frequently fascinated and then as frequently puzzled by Merton’s irritating ambiguity. These impressions suggest the technique of a bomb-
disposal engineer reporting by radio every little movement he makes, every minute observation of the deadly contraption that he is trying to analyze and disarm at great risk to his life: the tape-recorded reporting can be expected to contain both the relevant and the irrelevant details, and no clear norms for distinguishing between them, until he dies in his heroic attempt.

Merton died in 1968 or three years after the last entry in this book. (A subsequent book, *The Asian Journal of Thomas Merton*, published earlier, contains the entries of the last three months.) His death is the final seal of a lifetime report that can now be submitted to communal discernment of the spirits that ruled the world then and surely continue to rule now. Such discernment may reveal insights about the explosive risks in human ambivalence, both in the individual and in the social structures in which he is immersed.

In reporting to the reading world his individual and social observations on life, Merton is somehow fulfilling "a vow of conversation," the title chosen by him, albeit as a verbal play on the Latin *conversatio morum* (conversion of manners). But there is no doubt about the importance of such communications.

Readers can easily identify with Merton in many areas of experience and reflection, but for personal reasons, only four of these areas are here selected for this review: (1) Merton's oneness with nature; (2) his need for solitude; (3) his disagreements with superiors; and (4) his negativity about technology.

Merton possessed a skill common to poets of nature and he used this explicitly in a mystic context. He saw God in all things, in the hills and valleys of the Kentucky countryside, in the streams that meandered around them, in the trees and grasses that adorned them, in the beasts and the birds that inhabited them, in the thunder and lightning and the storms that periodically drenched and purified them. He was mystically aware of being one with all of them in their liturgical rhythms of days and seasons. This awareness of cosmic oneness is skillfully revealed in short phrases and paragraphs lavishly strewn like flowers all over the book in playful disarray.

One with nature, yes, but not with his monastic community. He probably felt that his brother monks did not or could not share his perceptions. This is hardly surprising, given the diversity of temperaments in any human community. But it caused him some pain. Whenever this pain became a bit unbearable, he longed for solitude, and eventually succeeded in getting his superiors to let him live in a hermitage outside the monastery compound.

Merton was not completely happy with this success. His journalistic apostolate, fruitful as it was, tied the publishing world like a ball and chain around his feet. It was obviously very fruitful even in a wordly way and thus called for hard decisions on the part of his superiors. To err is human and his superiors were very human. So was Merton. Human errors led to
human conflicts even with the purest of intentions. No doubt, Merton must have realized that his vow of obedience and his vow of "conversation" were becoming dialectically polarized.

Such polarizations sometimes lead to negativity in outlook: Merton had little sympathy for modern technology. Thus he wrote on November 16, 1964: "When it comes to taking sides (regarding technology), I am perhaps with Ellul and Massignon rather than with Teilhard de Chardin." This may be a result of his greater familiarity with the shameless technology then being inflicted on human beings in Vietnam and with the sonic booms of SAC planes thundering over his hermitage. It seems that literary geniuses like Merton are, as a general rule, disqualified from insights into creative technology. (In this, Teilhard was a remarkable exception.)

What a pity. The technological structures that led to shame in Vietnam are still in place today. This situation can be transcended, not by damning technology but by dominating it. Symbolically and ironically, failure to master technology ended Merton's life of "conversation": he was electrocuted by a defective electric fan. If he had only learned the technology of household electricity, his literary gifts and mystic insights may still be active today in a two-way conversation with mankind.

The book was edited by Merton's friend Naomi Burton Stone, who was also a friend of Merton's abbot. Her professional and non-censorious editing is conducive to harmony. Sometimes, Merton must have felt the need to express his honest anger. For their part, the Cistercian censors would wish to edify many classes of readers. No doubt, a certain class of readers would prefer to be amused by disedifying items. But how much good will such amusement achieve? In such a delicate situation, the editor wisely decided to write a preface remarkable for its impeccable tact and taste.

Vicente Marasigan, S.J.


"Twenty-first anniversary today —

My thanks to you, Father, for deigning to share with this fragile being a part of Christ's priesthood.

Twenty-one years ago, the nature of this sharing and the activities connected with it were fairly clear in my mind.

Now these are not as clear. There is a hunger within for some clarity, sharpness, for greater definition . . .

Yes, Lord, you remind me gently that you are God, my Lord. And that I