and freely uses his artistic imagination to create a very human and highly gifted character in the person of a Carmelite contemplative fittingly named Father Elijah. Elijah accepts a papal mission to communicate a salutary message to the president of a supranational club that carefully conceals its alliance with the world rulers of this present darkness. The mission is not yet fully accomplished. The shepherds of the flock are scattered, persecuted, hounded into exile in some mysterious wilderness. Salvation history is revealed as a mystery of suffering and hope. Readers familiar with the scriptural symbolism of Elijah will eagerly welcome a sequel integrating the insights of these three authors.

*Vicente Marasigan, S.J.*


This 352-page collection of letters of Thomas Merton is a very rich treasury of materials for researchers in communal discernment. I believe that the 31 pages (200-30), forming a chapter entitled "Vocation Crisis: 1959-1960," can be taken as one key with which to unlock this treasury.

The editor Shannon has good reasons for thematizing the collection as a witnessing to freedom, for such indeed was Merton’s constant desire insofar as he was conscious of this. But Merton knew that he was freely choosing a vocation that would relativize his freedom with a vow of obedience. And of celibacy. Whenever religious vows and relativized freedom clash at certain points, crisis will necessarily arise. There were many times of crisis in the period covered, 1946-68, of which the vocation crisis was one.

Besides his vocation to contemplative solitude, Merton also had a secular vocation as a writer. He was strongly attached to this activity but he was not always sure whether this attachment was inordinate or not. Much of his correspondence was with individuals requesting advice about spiritual matters and this was perfectly harmless and often inspiring. Others involved politics, whether national, global or ecclesiastical. In these matters, his Cistercian censors did not always discern matters the way he did, and he judged, rightly or wrongly, that they were excessively influenced by partisan concerns or personal bias. He even wrote a letter to his friend Archbishop Paul Philippe, secretary of the Vatican’s Congregation for Religious, to use his influence to obtain permission for him to live in Cuernavaca in a primitive monastic group
under the direction of Fr. Lemercier. He had a great admiration for Lemercier. But later he saw a newspaper photograph of Lemercier with his new young bride.

Merton must have grown in spiritual discernment by this time. A reader may or may not read between Shannon’s editorial lines on page 226 that Merton still valued celibacy as necessary for a contemplative hermit, even if there was a time when this was imperiled by a heart problem when he was confined in a Louisville hospital, a painful problem that was honestly faced and prayerfully solved (p. 238).

The highest freedom to which Merton’s life has given witness is the freedom to grow in communal discernment. Celibacy is communally discerned in many centuries of spirituality, whether Christian or non-Christian, as the most solid foundation for consecrated contemplatives. In this tradition, priesthood is optional but celibacy is not.

Vicente Marasigan, S.J.