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*Palgrave Macmillan is proud to present the true story of one of the twentieth century's  
most important spiritual writers and thinkers . . .*

## **BENEATH THE MASK OF HOLINESS: THOMAS MERTON AND THE FORBIDDEN LOVE AFFAIR THAT SET HIM FREE**

*“Love is our true destiny. We do not find the meaning of life by ourselves alone –  
we find it with another.”*  
--Thomas Merton

### **Book Trailer Available at YouTube.com**

In **BENEATH THE MASK OF HOLINESS: *Thomas Merton and the Forbidden Love Affair That Set Him Free***, author and Thomas Merton expert **Mark Shaw** boldly exposes the man behind the legend while chronicling a never-before told magical love story as compelling as Romeo and Juliet. During the mid-twentieth century, this literary icon was the most famous monk in the world, one who wrote more than seventy books including the bestselling *The Seven Storey Mountain*. It outsold books by literary greats Hemingway and Kerouac causing Merton to be labeled a “genius,” a “prophet,” and “the most important spiritual writer of the twentieth century” (Dutch priest Henri Nouwen). Joan Baez called Merton “a true man with the lightness like the Dalai Lama.” Ann Lamott said Merton “was a source of light and comfort and humor for me.” One of Merton’s creations, *Wisdom of the Desert*, was applauded by Oprah Winfrey as “one of the five books everyone should read at least once.”

Merton’s books inspired millions who believed he was the cheerful, contemplative monk the Catholic Church promoted him to be. But, as Shaw discovered through Merton’s private journals, there existed a more human side to Merton causing the gifted wordsmith to suffer and admit, “The depressions are deeper, more frequent. I am near fifty. People think I am happy.” Three reasons for this inner anguish existed: one, Merton felt guilt over pre-monastic sinful conduct that included womanizing, fathering a child out of wedlock, and adultery, two, *The Seven Storey Mountain* had been censored causing Merton to live a lie, and three, Merton’s admitted that he had never learned how to love,

or be loved. This was surprising since Merton had written, “One thing that has suddenly hit me, that nothing counts except love.”

As the year 1966 began, Merton’s journals showed he yearned to love, but there was no woman to love, and monastic rules forbade it. But then, while recovering in a hospital from back surgery, a sensual student nurse half his age named Margie Smith soothed his pain with a sponge bath and it was love at first sight. For the next eighteen months, the clandestine romance flourished as eroticism (“We loved each other to ecstasy; our lips say everything”) turned to true love (“[Margie] completes me.”). Condemnation of the affair by Merton’s abbot (Merton wrote, “we are like Eve and Adam”) caused him to violate his vows as he struggled with the same marriage restrictions Miami priest Alberto Cutie experienced earlier this year.

Finally, Shaw discovered, Merton had to choose between Margie, the woman he called, “a miracle in my life,” or the God who had saved his soul. When he finally chose, Merton emerged renewed: stronger and surer than he would have been without being tested by such a shattering conflict. As Shaw states in this provocative biography, “The true story of Thomas Merton is much more compelling than watered-down versions promoted by the Catholic Church. Merton’s quest to find his true identity and discover freedom for the first time in his life will inspire all those who search for love in today’s confusing world.”

**Mark Shaw** is the author of fifteen books. He holds a masters degree in theological studies and is a member of the International Thomas Merton Society. A former defense attorney and columnist for the *Aspen Daily News*, Mark spent two years researching Merton’s writings and private journals and interviewing those who knew Merton best. He also hosts a Merton blog (<http://merton.markshawbooks.net/>), and features more about Merton at [www.markshawbooks.net](http://www.markshawbooks.net). Mark lives in Superior, Colorado with his wife Wen-ying Lu and their Labrador, Black Sox.

**Please take this opportunity to read and review BENEATH THE MASK OF HOLINESS, Thomas Merton’s inspiring love story.**

<p style="text-align:center"><b>BENEATH THE MASK OF HOLINESS</b> <b>THOMAS MERTON AND THE FORBIDDEN LOVE AFFAIR THAT SET HIM FREE</b> <b>By Mark Shaw</b> Palgrave Macmillan; November 10, 2009; \$27.00; Hardcover; ISBN-13: 978-0-230-61653-0</p>
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