


# Of angels and giants: Thomas Merton's warnings to a technologically fixated humanity



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Thomas Merton foresaw the potential for technology to displace spirituality and dehumanise society. His warnings about the danger of replacing angels with machines and the geopolitical power struggles between Gog and Magog are explored in the light of Merton's concerns about the spiritual implications of technological progress and the erosion of human values. Merton's prophetic spirituality, characterised by simplicity, solitude and authenticity, and his critique of technological civilisation's impact on language and culture are examined in relation to Merton's reflections on the invisibility of technology and its influence on human perception, along with his call for a return to spiritual guidance and community. Merton's views on the geopolitical dynamics of the 21st century are also addressed, drawing parallels between his era and contemporary global relations. Ultimately, the importance of heeding Merton's warnings and seeking solutions from the global south to navigate the challenges posed by technological and geopolitical forces is highlighted.

**Intradisciplinary and/or interdisciplinary implications:** This article seeks to emphasise the implications that can be drawn from Merton's writing, which can, in turn, lead to a better understanding and more careful theological navigation of the challenges presented by rampant technological advancement.

**Keywords:** Thomas Merton; technology; Gog; Magog; angels; giants.

## Introduction

Living as he did, amid the Third Industrial Revolution, which saw the early forays into the technological innovations that laid the foundation for the technologically fascinated and obsessed world in which we live today, Thomas Merton possessed the ability to be able to warn the world of the dangers that might lie ahead. He entered the monastery at Gethsemani in 1941, died in 1968 and believed that by entering the monastery, his vocation as a writer was over. He could not have been more mistaken. Over time, his superiors, although alarmed by some of his more radical positions, nevertheless allowed him some freedom to express his perspectives on several issues in written form.

In this article, I shall examine Merton's capacity to discern trends in technological advancement that were already evident in his own day, extrapolate those into the future and warn against the dangers that he saw ahead. Specifically, I shall firstly investigate Merton's warnings that unrestricted technological advancement, having pushed God to the periphery, would then replace God's messengers with machines. Secondly, I shall explore Merton's warnings about the geopolitical power blocs of Gog and Magog and how those warnings can help us to navigate our way today. I shall point to Merton's suggestion that in order to curtail these dangers, the people of the Global South might be able to offer some guidance to those abandoned by the power struggle between those twin powers in the north.

## Merton the observer

In a rapidly changing and, in some ways, more confusing world, it becomes important to identify those who can help us to navigate in uncertain waters. Some of those who can provide such navigation tools are those who were able to foresee what was coming and warn against it. In many ways, Thomas Merton was just such a voice. He was a perceptive and engaged observer of his own times and was very clear about what he understood as the dangers that lay ahead if the technological changes that began in his day were allowed to continue without restraint. In this article, I shall explore some of Merton's warnings about those very dangers in the light of Merton's own prophetic spirituality. There are a number of examples that could be used as points of reference to demonstrate the extent of Merton's prophetic spirituality, but for the purpose of this

article, I shall explore this based on two primary texts written and published during the 1960s.

Firstly, 'The Angel and the Machine' was published in 1967 as an article for his friend William Everson (Dominican priest and poet, Brother Antonius) that was included in a short-lived publication called 'Season' a quarterly that raised awareness of human problems, published by the Dominican House of Studies at Berkeley. In it, we have one of Merton's sharpest critiques of technological humanity.

Secondly, 'A Letter to Pablo Antonio Cuadra concerning Giants' was published in 1962 and expresses Merton's perception of the geopolitical forces in his day and into the future.

## Merton and the dangers of technology

Thomas Merton had an unusual ability to foresee the devastating and destructive impact that unrestricted technological development could have on humanity in general and on spirituality in particular. Merton grappled with the complexities of the 20th century, offering profound insights into the human condition amidst the rise of technology and its pervasive influence.

He was deeply concerned with the spiritual implications of a rapidly changing world, marked by technological advancements and the looming threat of dehumanisation, and his writings explore his observations on the tension between the sacred and the secular, the contemplative life and the demands of 21st-century society. His reflections resonate with contemporary anxieties surrounding transhumanism and the potential for technology to both elevate and enslave humanity.

Regarding transhumanism, Cloete points out that transhumanism does not mean that humans will be replaced by technology, but that they will be enhanced by it. She quotes The Transhumanist Declaration by the former World Transhumanist Association (Cloete 2023):

Humanity will be radically changed by technology in the future. We foresee the feasibility of redesigning of the human condition, including such parameters as the inevitability of aging, limitations on human and artificial intellects, unchosen psychology, suffering, and our confinement to the planet earth. (p. 336)

In this regard, Fukuyama asks 'If we start transforming ourselves into something superior, what rights will these enhanced creatures claim, and what rights will they possess when compared to those left behind?' (Fukuyama 2004:42). Merton's exploration of the 'technological man' anticipates contemporary discussions about the blurring lines between humans and machines, challenging us to consider the ethical and spiritual implications of our technological pursuits, which might either transform humanity into something greater or trap us in a waking nightmare in which (Fukuyama 2004):

[I]f we do not develop [a humility and respect for our human nature] soon, we may unwittingly invite the transhumanist to deface humanity with their genetic bulldozers and psychotropic shopping malls. (p. 43)

Merton warned us that unless we tread carefully, we might come to the place in society where we become so anaesthetised to the effects of technology upon our lives that we fail to even see it anymore; it becomes invisible. Zaidi and Shahzad explain that (Zaidi & Shahzad 2020):

[T]echnology is invisible not in the sense that it has vanished but invisibility of technology suggests that it has become one with society, which has blurred the binaries between technology and culture. (p. 98)

In Wu's opinion, Merton warned against just such blindness as Merton witnessed Christ's redemptive purposes through creation so that (Wu 1998):

[O]ur eyes and ears, particularly in the light of faith, are enlightened and informed in ways that ancient prophets and other men and women of good will were not privy to. (p. 173)

One of the contributing factors to the invisibility of technology is the way in which technology has influenced our use of language. O Sullivan (2006) makes the link between the language of a technologically obsessed humanity and the function of the machine itself in which:

[L]anguage when linked to the machine it describes, becomes itself mechanical ... [*Steel words*] can only describe accurately the machine in whose image they are formed. This is true whether the machine is the political machine invested in war and the supremacy of the state or the individual machine which enslaves those who make it their [g]od. (p. 150)

## Merton's prophetic spirituality

Langerman and Marchinkowski (2023:4-5) deal at some length with Merton's prophetic spirituality and suggest that Thomas Merton's prophetic spirituality developed from four key perspectives:

- **Prophetic Worldview:** Merton exercised his prophetic imagination and applied it to poetry and literature to highlight and challenge societal evils and misplaced values.
- **Underlying Values:** Merton's core spiritual values were grounded in simplicity, solitude and authenticity and aimed to reveal and break societal addictions and illusions.
- **Charismatic Nature:** Merton was open to the guidance of the Holy Spirit, and this helped to ensure that his prophetic insights remained free from institutional constraints.
- **Faithfulness to God:** Merton's commitment to God was central, helping him to expose and challenge corrupt values, wherever he might uncover these.

While I shall not be exploring these in any depth here, they remain a useful lens through which to view Merton's warnings about the future.

## Merton and the angels

Langerman and Marchinkowski (2023), quoting Sigmon and Nouwen, make the point that people may experience disconnection as they try to:

[R]each out to others when they themselves are lonely, fearful, disconnected and live under the illusion of immortality. Western culture, partnered with technology, sought to persuade human beings that they are infinite, immortal, in the sense that we can prolong our earthly existence through better medicine, more advanced technology, and a healthy lifestyle. This is an illusion and an avoidance of the spiritual and transcendent. (p. 17)

One of the dangers that Merton warned against was the danger that a society obsessed with technology would replace angels with machines and, therefore, forsake any concept of transcendence (Merton 1997:4). On the issue of the transcendent, Merton wrote:

There are many moderns who are prepared to accept a world of 'inwardness' and immanent spirituality, but not a world of religion marked by faith and dependence on a transcendent and personal God. (p. 6)

Further, referring to the angels and their roles, Merton (1997) wrote, that:

[T]he angels are our brothers and fellow servants in a world of freedom and of grace [...] Their presence around us, unimaginable, tender, solicitous and mighty, terrible as it is gentle, is increasingly forgotten while the personal horizon of our spiritual vision shrinks and closes in upon ourselves. (p. 6)

He argued that the 'death of God' has also led to the 'death' of the angels, in that it has brought about our inability to hear the angels speak (Merton 1997):

God speaks to us in and through them, and in so doing he also speaks to us their identity, revealing in them strange and sacred personalities which bear witness to him in his utter hiddenness [...] We have forgotten how to trust these strangers, and because of our suspicion we have denied them. Mistrust of the Lord begins therefore with mistrust of his messengers. And how easy it is to mistrust those invisible ones who speak more by sudden and significant silences than by clear and probative statements. (p. 3)

For Merton (1997), when technological civilisation replaces angels with machines, they have placed the machines:

[A]t the limit of our own strength, at the frontier of our natural capacity. But now we can view our limits without fear and without the need of invisible helpers. The machine is fully visible. And though the world of the machines is in itself something of a *mysterium tremendum* (it becomes so more with computers performing in an instant mental operation that man could never hope to perform in years), yet the machines are 'our' angels. (p. 4)

Merton's point is that when people replace the angels with machines, they lose the sense of the transcendent, the numinous. Sarbacker, referencing Rudolf Otto's work, writes (Sarbacker 2016):

The numinous is [...] characterized by its mysterious or 'mystery' [*mysterium*] quality, which in turn is characterized by its

tremendous or fear inspiring [*tremendum*] and fascinating or awe-inspiring [*fascinans*] aspects, the whole of which is referred to as the *Mysterium tremendum et fascinans*. (p. 4)

Merton (1997) speculated that we are more comfortable with the machine angels because we made them, and we believe we can control them. They are extensions of our own ability, and:

[W]e do not have to walk to the edge of an infinite void in order to feel the brush of their unpredictable wings upon us in the starlight. They form part of our own enclosed and comfortable world they stand between us and nature. (p. 4)

Merton issued a challenge from the 1960s to 21st-century humanity to reflect deeply on the potential negative impacts of technology and the mentality that comes from a technologically dominated culture. Merton's proposed solutions to the inherent dangers of this domination by the machine are the creation of a true community, as an alternative to the mindless collectivism that comes from machines and algorithms, which Merton calls 'technique'.

Merton not only issues prophetic warnings regarding the use, and abuse, of technology; he also offers a measure of hope for the future through careful reflections on humanising work; applying a measured approach to using technologies; recognising the role of nature as a source of healing; and the adoption of the philosophy of a solitary. (Van Staden 2016:127)

While those who read Merton's words in the 1960s might have regarded these predictions as somewhat far-fetched, they have become eerily accurate, as Wilson (2021) points out. He argues that in our overly connected digital world, humans have gained:

[T]remendous intellectual power that humans previously thought belonged to angels and divine spirits. Humans have not only caught up with the angels, but are becoming gods, as noted by Yuval Harari. (p. 122)

Merton (1997) seems to have anticipated the rise of artificial intelligence (AI) when, firstly, he writes about:

[O]ther angelic intelligences secretly building the brilliant and prestigious realm of mechanical power all around man, and silently taking it out of his hands while he thinks himself to be the master of it. (p. 4)

Secondly, he demolished the argument that these machines will save us time when he wrote (Merton 1997):

They form part of our own enclosed and comfortable world. they stand between us and nature. They form a kind of 'room' in which we are isolated from the rest of material creation, and therefore all the more from spiritual beings. They create our weather for us. They even abolish day and night. They make the heavens unnecessary. They make for us a new 'time' and new 'space'. ... [T]he 'time' created for us by the machines that 'save time' for us, is a time of new dimensions, a new spiritual measurement in which, curiously, all is breathless and thought is strangely distracted and confused. (pp. 4-5)

Whether this has anything to do with Merton or not, it is interesting that there is a tendency when people speak about

the rise and future of AI and machine learning (ML), for them to reference angels in that discussion. For example, Haselager, in the context of discussing the way in which Aquinas distinguished the cognition of humans and angels and arguing that the problem with AI is that its language processing does not lead to understanding, contends (Haselager 2024):

Compared to humans, AI might be superior in performance in at least some domains, going through the logical motions in order to reach well-founded conclusions while at the same time being devoid of what ultimately matters, namely, understanding what those conclusions are about. (p. 670)

Another example of a place where Merton's identification between angels and machines, first voiced in 1967, seems to find an echo in our century is in the coding of gaming algorithms, where certain ML algorithms are designated as Automatic Games Enhancement Layer, abbreviated 'Angel'. These ML algorithms seek 'to leverage Machine Learning (ML) techniques to automate the classification and isolation of interactive (e.g. games, voice over IP) and non-interactive (e.g. web) traffic' (But et al. 2007:1).

A further example where we can see signs of Merton's prophetic foresight is in the rise of social media, which draws people into an almost false, artificial world, devoid of any real human connection. Merton issued a stern warning against this, quoting Russian theologian P. Evdokimov (Merton 1997):

[T]he devil acts on man as 'a will which is alien to him, which draws him out of himself without providing for him any encounter'. Surely this describes the actual situation of technological man. (p. 6)

Merton also seems to have anticipated the rise of 'cancel culture' when he contended that, when we have separated ourselves from any sense of objectivity as to what is right and wrong, we can designate people as undesirable based on whatever subjective impulse is current at the time. We can also (Merton 1962):

[A]ttach to each [*undesirable*] an arbitrary label which requires no action on his part and no effort or thought on the part of the accuser. This enable society to get rid of 'criminals' without having to go through any kind of inconvenience by committing an actual crime. (p. 72)

Merton believed that technological civilisation's reliance on machines has closed off the horizon of spiritual freedom and caused dislocation, making it difficult for people to comprehend themselves or face the supernatural. Merton emphasised that while technology itself is not inherently bad, it is our choice to rely solely on it and exclude spiritual elements that have made our world spiritually inhospitable. He called for a rethinking of our position and a return to spiritual guidance, suggesting that angels can help us live with technology in a more balanced and meaningful way. Merton's solution to the exclusion and replacement of the angels with the machine is that the angels still await us at those '[...] limits where we face the void from which no mechanical rescue is imaginable. And these frontiers will never be abolished' (Merton 1997:6).

## Merton and the giants

As Golomboski points out (Golomboski 2020), Merton's relationship with Latin America and the global South was especially evident in his correspondence with writers and intellectuals from across the Southern Hemisphere. Merton had significant correspondence with the Nicaraguan poet Pablo Antonio Cuadra. In his 1963 volume of poetry, 'Emblems of a Season of Fury', Merton included an essay in the form of an open letter, titled 'Letter to Pablo Antonio Cuadra Concerning Giants'. Here we have Merton's critical reflection on the geopolitical situation in the world of the 1960s, which remains profoundly relevant to where we find ourselves today, a quarter of the way through the 21st century. In his critique, Merton leaned heavily on Ezekiel's concepts of Gog and Magog as describing the relationship between East and West of the 1960s. In the midst of the Cold War, in the aftermath of World War II and the constant threat of nuclear catastrophe, Merton believed that the conflict between Magog (the West, led by the United States of America) and Gog (the Communist world, led by Russia) arose out of the emptiness that technological humanity had created for themselves. Merton argues that the West and the Communist world, '[...] resemble one another like a pair of twins [...]' and that '[t]he truth is that there is a little of Gog and Magog even in the best of us' (Merton 1962:70).

It must be noted that not everyone appreciated Merton's analysis in this piece. Retired American diplomat GT Dempsey, in his review of the piece, remarked that (Dempsey 2002):

[I]t would be fair to characterise the piece as a self-indulgent rant with arguments resting entirely on condescending sneers and romanticised ahistorical twaddle about any race which could be considered non-white: 'Western civilization is now in full decline into barbarism', while the Maya and the Inca 'had deep things to say'. (p. 367)

Despite Dempsey's scepticism, no doubt shared by others of his political persuasion, Merton's (1962) analysis offers insights that have stood the test of time. For example, Merton argued that in a technological world that claims to value progress:

[N]o one cares for progress but only what can be said about it, what price can be put on it, what political advantage may be gained from it. Gog is a love of power, Magog is absorbed in the cult of money: their idols differ, and their faces seem to be dead set against one another, but the madness is the same: they are the two faces of Janus looking inward and dividing with critical fury the polluted sanctuary of dehumanized man. (p. 71)

In a world that is, in some ways, far different from the one Merton inhabited and wrote about, it is tempting to think that the global geopolitical situation has shifted significantly from the one Merton experienced and warned about. However, Mngomezulu (2019) reminds us that:

[I]t is an irrefutable fact that apart from focusing on how countries interact with and relate to one another across the globe, International Relations (IR) are first and foremost about power relations and power dynamics among different countries with varying sizes and systems of governance. (p. 182)

Friedberg (2023) seems to agree with this, writing about the situation in our 'post-post-Cold War era':

Now, as then, a pair of continental authoritarian giants are facing off against a coalition made up largely of democracies arrayed around the periphery of Eurasia and backed from across the oceans by the United States. And, as was true in the second half of the twentieth century, the two blocs have begun to compete for followers, access, and influence in the developing world. (p. 2)

Alive to these dangers in his day and ours, Merton (1962) counselled that we must not be deceived by the rhetoric and sabre rattling that takes place between these power blocs in which they continually threaten to destroy one another, because, as he advised:

[T]hat is why we must not be deceived by the giants, and by their thunderous denunciations of one another, their preparations for destruction. The fact that they are powerful does not mean that are sane, and the fact that they speak with intense conviction does mean that they speak the truth. Nor is their size any proof that possess a metaphysic solidarity. Are they not perhaps spectres without essence, emanations from the terrified and puny hearts of politicians, policemen and millionaires? (p. 70)

In his reference to the giants represented by the emanations of policemen and millionaires, Merton already identified one of the greatest threats to world peace in our time – the spectre of fabulously powerful and wealthy, unelected individuals who operate in the shadows and yet exercise great influence in world events. In 2023, the *New Yorker* published an article about the growing influence of Elon Musk on the war in Ukraine. Having pointed out that Musk's Starlink system became the backbone of Ukrainian communication in their ongoing war with Russia, Ronan Farrow (2023) goes on to point out that:

In the ensuing months, fund-raising in Silicon Valley's Ukrainian community, contracts with the U.S. Agency for International Development [USAID] and with European governments, and pro-bono contributions from SpaceX facilitated the transfer of thousands of Starlink units to Ukraine. (n.p.)

However, Farrow (2023) goes on to quote Musk associate and business partner, Reid Hoffman, who reported:

Musk even appeared to express support for Vladimir Putin [...] Musk seemed, he said, to have bought what Putin was selling, hook, line, and sinker. A week later, Musk tweeted a proposal for his own peace plan, which called for new referendums to redraw the borders of Ukraine, and granted Russia control of Crimea ... In later tweets, Musk portrayed as inevitable an outcome favoring Russia and attached maps highlighting eastern Ukrainian territories, some of which, he argued, 'prefer Russia'. (n.p.)

In what Friedberg calls 'an axis of authoritarians', 'both Moscow and Beijing have believed that they face a common geopolitical foe: an arrogant and overbearing American hegemon that, together with its regional allies, is determined to block their revisionist territorial ambitions and deny them a sphere of influence commensurate with their power' (Friedberg 2023:2). Mngomezulu (2019) reminds us that:

Put simply, powerful states use coercion, inducement, or both to exert their power, authority and influence. This gives them access to whatever the weaker states might have. If they do not have any material possessions to cede to the powerful states, smaller states end up running the errands of their powerful 'handlers' against their will, to maintain or sustain the links. (p. 183)

Merton's very sharp judgements on Gog and Magog are linked to, and heavily influenced by, his conviction that human life was being consumed by technological advances and that the ever-present danger was that technology would eventually remove from us what defines us as human beings. As Wu (2000) points out:

I conclude that [Merton's] writings all appear to reflect, directly or indirectly, an affirmation of life, of nature and the personal that speaks out unequivocally against a technology that is always in danger of swallowing up the given, particularly our interiority, that is, what is not man-made or humanly conceived. (p. 83)

In words that seem to reflect the current preoccupation of the very wealthy with going into space and even colonising Mars, one particular aspect of technological humanity that disturbed Merton greatly was that we have unleashed the current drive to technological destruction by focusing on weapons and space exploration at the expense of overcoming poverty and world hunger. Merton (1962) claimed that:

[T]he storm of history [...] has sprung unbidden out of the emptiness of technological man. It is the genii he has summoned out of the depths of his own confusion, this complacent sorcerer's accomplice who spends billions on weapons of destruction and space rockets when he cannot provide decent meals shelter and clothing for two thirds of humanity. Is it improper to doubt the intelligence and sincerity of modern man? (p. 69)

Looking at the landscape of warfare in the middle of the 1960s, and now in the 21st century, highlights how drones and remotely operated machines can rain down death while being controlled from very far away, Merton (1976) reflected that:

Modern warfare is fought as much by machines as by men. An entirely new dimension is opened up by the fantastic processes and techniques involved. An American President can speak of warfare in outer space and nobody bursts out laughing – he is perfectly serious. Science fiction and the comic strip have all suddenly come true. (p. 16)

Demonstrating just what Merton was concerned about in 1962, writing in *New Space* in 2017, Elon Musk set out the planning and vision for the colonisation of Mars. In a world facing ever greater challenges of poverty, hunger, global conflict and increasing gaps between the very rich and everybody else, Musk (2017) wrote:

You want to wake up in the morning and think the future is going to be great – and that's what being a spacefaring civilization is all about. It's about believing in the future and thinking that the future will be better than the past. And I can't think of anything more exciting than going out there and being among the stars. (p. 2)

Clearly, Merton did not consider the enlightenment of the late 20th century something to be celebrated because it was that very enlightenment that led to fascism, an unquestioning acceptance of authority and extermination camps. In a chilling anticipation of the situation in the USA today, where the sitting president has been convicted of 34 felonies (cf. Graham 2025), where suspicion of immigrants and foreigners is welcomed and in the murky reality of a 'post-truth' world, Merton (1962) warned:

We must be wary of ourselves when the worst that is in man comes objectified in society, approved, acclaimed and deified, when hatred becomes patriotism and murder a holy duty, when spying and delation are love of truth and the stool pigeon is a public benefactor, when the gnawing and prurient resentments of the frustrated bureaucrats become the conscience of the people and the gangster is enthroned in power, then we must fear the voice of our own heart, even when denounces them. For are we not all tainted with the same poison? (p. 70)

Showing just how dangerous the situation against which Merton warned is, Abel demonstrates ways in which the current US president has acted to undermine democratic institutions by routinely labelling facts with which he disagrees as fake, has disregarded the separation of powers, has disrespected judges and mocked them openly. President Trump directly inserted himself into the Mueller investigation, proclaiming 'I'm actually, I guess, the chief law enforcement officer of the country'. President Trump promised and then dispensed pardons to those who broke the law to support him. He fired both the Director and Deputy Director of the FBI for doing their jobs and fired Attorney General Sessions when he recused himself from the Russia investigation, as Sessions was obliged to do (see Abel 2022:526).

Despite his clarity on what he saw in the future, Merton refused to become pessimistic. Rather, he regarded the future with a degree of hopefulness. Despite their public statements in Merton's time, Merton predicted that Gog and Magog would one day join forces and, like the blind leading the blind, lead those who follow them into their wilderness of spiritual emptiness. And then (Wu 1998):

[W]hat makes it all the more frightening is that, lacking any formidable idea of Transcendence by which to perceive a Self beyond the Self, we will then – both East and West – be carried off into the future by a relationship mutually fuelled not by paradisiacal but parasitical interests, wholly utilitarian and pragmatic and without any clear vision nor substantive goals or values. From this rather despairing point of view. Thomas Merton suddenly becomes a most welcome paradigmatic hope upon which to hang our fractured existences. (p. 180)

In Merton's reflections on the future of Gog and Magog, Merton looked to the global South as a source of hope. Merton's opinion was that, whereas the people of North America have been corrupted by their obsession with money, many Latin American communities have 'absorbed more of the sophistication of Europe and remain rooted in a past that has never yet been surpassed on this continent'

(Merton 1962:79). Consequently, he describes Latin America as 'by and large culturally superior to the United States' (Merton 1962:79). For Merton, the richness of Latin America has been lost on too many white people of North America of European descent (Golemboski 2020). Those inhabitants of the West have demonstrated an 'unmitigated arrogance towards the rest of the human race' (Merton 1962:74). Christian missionaries failed to recognise the spiritual vitality of indigenous Americans. 'Did anyone pay attention', Merton asked, 'to the voices of the Maya and the Inca, who had deep things to say?' (Merton 1962:76). No, of course, is the answer. Instead, missionaries debated whether Native Americans could even be considered fully human (Golemboski 2020).

Merton explained that, over time, the failure of North Americans to appreciate their Latin American neighbours, their failure to comprehend that 'they had a culture, that they had more than something to sell' (Merton 1962:79), corrupted and destroyed the sense of Pan-American solidarity that should have united the peoples of the Western Hemisphere. The dominance of commercial interests over the transactional nature and zero sum game of modern capitalism 'has destroyed the sense of relationship, the spiritual community that had already begun to flourish in the years of [Venezuelan independence leader Simon] Bolivar' (Merton 1962:79). The myth of North American superiority has disrupted the possibility of a broader American community – on Merton's account – to the detriment of Latin Americans and North Americans alike (Golemboski 2020).

Regarding Africa's role in the unfolding of a new international global partnership that should emerge from the disintegration of Gog and Magog, Mngomezulu (2019) argues:

As its basic requirement, globalization calls for the demolition of borders. It propagates the view that no country or continent can survive on its own. If the West cannot survive and fully understand [international relations] without Africans, the opposite is equally true. It is within this context that the notion of power in [international relations] needs to be revisited. (p. 190)

## Conclusion

I have argued that Merton's clarity of vision and foresight warned against the adverse effects of uninhibited technological development in the latter half of the 20th century and into the 21st century. Specifically, he warned that with the death of God, one of the effects of unregulated technological development would be that we would replace angels with devices of our own making. The consequence would be that these devices would become increasingly able to do in seconds what it would take a human being to do in hours or days, months or years. The danger is that technological humans think that, as they created the machine, they can also stop or severely hinder the power of machines to take over, but, Merton warned, by the time that comes on technological man, they would be too short-sighted to even recognise what was happening and, consequently, unable to do anything about it. Merton also warned about the potentially

devastating and destructive effects of the great earthly powers, Gog and Magog, to wreak destruction on the earth. Merton recognised that despite their language, which is mostly hostile and caustic, these two power blocs are mirror images of one another, and each needs the other to survive. In response to these threats, Merton recommended looking South to find solutions that were sensitive to the creation and grounded in true community. There is no doubt that as the world enters an extremely unstable and unpredictable future, the need to listen to the voices of prophets like Merton becomes even more important, or else the nuclear holocaust he feared might well be unleashed in our day.

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