

Thomas Merton - Prophecy or Nostalgia?

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"It was my defeat that was to be the occasion of my rescue"

In 1936, Merton was at Columbia University.[i] He was continuing the addictive and profligate life he had grown used to, firstly at Oakham, then at Cambridge. He writes of that time at Columbia:

Three or four nights a week my fraternity brothers and I would go flying down in the black and roaring subway to 52nd Street, where we would crawl around the tiny, noisy and expensive nightclubs that had flowered on the sites of the old speakeasies in the cellars of those dirty brownstone houses. There we would sit for hours, packed in those dark rooms, shoulder to shoulder with a lot of surly strangers and their girls while the whole place rocked and surged with storms of jazz. [ii]

Merton then goes on to reflect:

It was not that we got drunk. No, it was this strange business of sitting in a room full of people and drinking without much speech, and letting yourself be deafened by the jazz that throbbed through the whole sea of bodies binding them all together in a kind of fluid medium. It was a strange animal travesty of mysticism.[iii]

Often he missed the last train back to Long Island where he lived with his grandparents. Occasionally he managed to get to the Flushing bus station on the off chance he might catch a bus home:

There is nothing so dismal as the Flushing bus station, in the grey, silent hour just before the coming of dawn. There were always at least one or two of those same characters whose prototypes I had seen dead in the morgue. And perhaps there would be a pair of drunken soldiers trying to get back to Fort Totten. Among all these I stood, weary and ready to fall, lighting the fortieth or fiftieth cigarette of the day [iv]

Towards the end of that year, 1936, Merton describes an event that sounds very much like a nervous breakdown. He was riding the train from Long Island into Manhattan:

It was as if some center of balance within me had been unexpectedly removed, and as if I were about to plunge into a blind abyss of emptiness without end.[v]

He went to the Pennsylvania Hotel and consulted the house physician. The doctor put him in a room in the hotel, suggesting to him that he needed to rest:

You could hear the noise of the traffic coming up from far below, on 32nd Street. But the room itself was quiet, with a quietness that was strange, ominous.[vi]

Unable to sleep, Merton was drawn to look at the window:

That window! It was huge. It seemed to go right down to the floor. Maybe the force of gravity would draw the whole bed, with me on it, to the edge of that abyss, and spill me headlong into the emptiness. And far, far away in my mind was a little, dry, mocking voice that said: 'What if you threw yourself out of that window'[vii]

After attempting various ways to deal with his perilous situation he concludes:

Here I was, scarcely four years after I had left Oakham and walked out into the world that I thought I was going to ransack and rob of all its pleasures and satisfactions. I had done what I intended, and now I found that it was I who was emptied and robbed and gutted. What a strange thing! In filling myself I had emptied myself. In grasping things, I had lost everything. In devouring pleasures and joys, I had found distress and anguish and fear. Such was the death of the hero, the great man I had wanted to be. If my nature had been more stubborn in clinging to the pleasures that disgusted me: if I had refused to admit that I was beaten by this futile search for satisfaction where it could not be found, and if my moral and nervous constitution had not caved in

under the weight of my own emptiness, who can tell what eventually would have happened to me? Who could tell where I would have ended? It was my defeat that was to be the occasion of my rescue.[viii]

Thomas Merton is here in the midst of a profound spiritual crisis. Yes, there is a physical and a psychological component. Yes, he needs rest. And he needs to be more sensible about the way he lives. But more than anything he needs to set his house in order. He reminds me of the Australian writer, Kim Mahood:

When I finally crawled out the landscape had changed in all sorts of subtle ways, or the way I saw it had changed, which amounts to the same thing. I had encountered someone in the fault-line whom I didn't know, and whom my own particular set of myths could not accommodate. She crawled out with me, inarticulate and storyless, and although she looked at the world through my eyes, when I tried to speak for her the language was crippled and absurd, full of psychological cliché. Over the years I learned, and am still learning, to listen to her silences. If my own busy voice goes on for too long she begins to howl, a primitive psychic noise which cannot be ignored.[ix]

Merton needs to pay attention and listen to the "primitive psychic noise" welling up from his bowels. This near-death experience has been an awakening for him. In this moment of awakening he needs to ask the most fundamental and practical question any of us can ask at any moment of our lives: "What's happening here?" And listen! Listen with the ear of the heart as Benedict was to teach him through the rule of life he eventually followed at Gethsemani.

"We may be true or false, the choice is ours"

Merton was a very experiential writer. He learned to "listen to the silences" and the "howls" by writing. He submitted to the truth and wisdom unfolding there and made it available to others. His journals are like footnotes to his life and teachings. For example, we can hear the voice of experience in this reflection:

Trees and animals have no problem. God makes them what they are without consulting them, and they are perfectly satisfied. With us it is different. God leaves us free to be whatever we like. We can be ourselves or not, as we please. We are at liberty to be real, or to be unreal. We may be true or false, the choice is ours. We may wear now one mask and now another, and never, if we so desire, appear with our own true face. But we cannot make these choices with impunity. Causes have effects, and if we lie to ourselves and to others, then we cannot expect to find truth and reality whenever we happen to want them. If we have chosen the way of falsity we must not be surprised that truth eludes us when we finally come to need it!"[x]

I will not be describing his path to conversion and provisional baptism in the Catholic Church on November 16 1938, or his path to entering the Cistercian monastery in Kentucky on December 10 1941.[xi] Suffice it to say that his life took on a very different focus at this time. That focus was characterized by two particularly deep and enduring themes: solitude and mysticism.

Merton's awakening meant he began to see himself and the world in a very different way: "All I know is that I walked in a new world".[xii] His baptism meant a radically new way of being. He took the theology of the sacraments, particularly baptism, very seriously:

For now I had entered into the everlasting movement of that gravitation which is the very life and spirit of God: God's own gravitation towards the depths of his own infinite nature, his goodness without end. And God, that center who is everywhere, and whose circumference is nowhere, finding me, through incorporation with Christ, incorporated into this immense and tremendous gravitational movement which is love, which is the Holy Spirit, loved me.[xiii]

Both his awakening and his baptism, oriented Merton towards a life focused on being rather than doing. The centre of gravity had shifted in his life. Merton expressed this succinctly a little over a year before he died:

We exist solely for this, to be the place He has chosen for His presence, His manifestation in the world, His epiphany. [xiv]

"Simply in the ground of life"

Merton never gives definitions of solitude or mysticism. That is not his way. However, he does leave us enough clues to build a good picture of what he had in mind.

At the heart of Merton's experience of solitude is the process of facing what he alone could and must face and submitting to the truth that in turn faced him. Solitude is more about truth than it is about geographical location or

whether or not we have company. Clearly, geography and the presence of others are relevant but the facing and the submitting seem to be the heart of the matter for Merton.

In his experience of mysticism is the lived awareness of unity. Mysticism is available to all and is born of true solitude. It is more about a liberated and integrated consciousness than it is about visions or special spiritual experiences.

In a 1966 article published in *Commonweal*, Merton wrote:

The way to find the real 'world' is not merely to measure and observe what is outside us, but to discover our own inner ground. For that is where the world is, first of all: in my deepest self.[xv]

The unexplored – and perhaps feared – hinterland of my own inner world, the other that dwells within me and is actually part of me, must be faced and discovered for what they are: my unique experience of a shared humanity. This is the path to true compassion and communion. We discover, through the facing and the submitting of solitude, that we are "already one".[xvi]

True solitude, as Merton understood it, necessarily leads into mysticism, the lived awareness that we are one with all in the One. There is, for Merton, a constant movement within in order to move out. Those movements are of a piece precisely because of the fact that we are "already one". But Merton is clear about the primacy of solitude in our journey towards the world:

Our real journey in life is interior: it is a matter of growth, deepening, and of an ever greater surrender to the creative action of love and grace in our hearts.[xvii]

William Shannon sums it up nicely:

But there was that inner geography he (ie Merton) could not cease from exploring, the interior journey that he had to get on with; and that is a journey that is always full of surprises. Little did he realize when he spoke his exuberant farewell to the world that that interior journey would bring him back once again into the world he thought he had forsaken. For his solitude had issued into what all true solitude must become: compassion.[xviii]

When Merton went to the monastery in December 1941 he brought with him some idealized perceptions of what his life was going to be like "enclosed in the four walls of my new freedom".[xix] The deepening experience of solitude not only helped him to begin to emerge from his idealizations, including idealizations of solitude. It opened rich horizons of human growth that had been buried under those idealizations.

In an essay written at the end of October 1966 entitled "Love and Solitude" he writes:

Is it true to say that one goes into solitude to 'get at the root of existence'? It would be better simply to say that in solitude one is at the root. (Those) [xx] who (are) alone, and (are) conscious of what (their) solitude means, find (themselves) simply in the ground of life. (They are) 'in Love.' (They are) in love with all, with everyone, with everything.[xxi]

"The very ground of ordinary life"

Merton goes on to make another important point here, linking both solitude and mysticism with ordinary existence:

Solitude is not withdrawal from ordinary life. It is not apart from, above, 'better than' ordinary life. On the contrary, solitude is the very ground of ordinary life. It is the very ground of that simple, unpretentious, fully human activity by which we quietly earn our daily living and share our experiences with a few intimate friends.[xxii]

He urges us to take steps to become aware of this truth. "We must learn to know and accept this ground of our being." [xxiii] Perhaps mindful of his own early life, he laments the fact that most people never awaken to this truth and therefore never experience the rich possibilities:

To most people, though it is always there, it is unthinkable and unknown. Consequently their life has no center and no foundation. It is dispersed in a pretense of 'togetherness' in which there is no real meaning. Only when our activity proceeds out of the ground in which we have consented to be dissolved does it have the divine fruitfulness of love and grace. Only then does it really reach others in true communion. Often our need for others is not love at all but only the need to be sustained in our illusions, even as we sustain others in theirs. But when we have renounced these illusions, then we can certainly go out to others in true compassion. It is in solitude that illusions finally dissolve.

And we must remain alert and attentive, persistent in the facing and the submitting, otherwise the idealizations – symptoms of the false self – can easily return:

But we must work hard to see that they do not reshape themselves in some worse form, peopling our solitude with devils disguised as angels of light. Love, simplicity, and compassion protect us against this. He who is truly alone finds in himself the heart of compassion with which to love not only this (person) or that but all (people). He sees them all in the One who is the Word of God, the perfect manifestation of God's Love, Jesus Christ.[xxiv]

"Nobody there. Panic!"

There are some who reject the idea that Merton still has anything of value to teach us. For example, Jim Forest writes in an Afterword to his biography of Merton:

In 2005, Bishop Donald Wuerl of Pittsburgh, chairman of a committee responsible for a new American Catholic Catechism aimed especially at young adults, decided that a profile of Merton should be struck from the draft text. The catechism was to include a profile in every chapter of an exemplary American Catholic, each entry giving an idea of the unexpected paths faith can open in one's life. (In the book as published, the section on prayer is the only one missing a profile.) One of the reasons given by the bishop for the removal of the Merton profile from the text was that 'the generation we were speaking to had no idea who he was'. Another factor, he said, was that 'we don't know all the details of the searching at the end of his life'.[xxv]

Neither of the bishop's comments seems cogent to me. If Merton, in his life and teaching, is worth getting to know, and if 'the generation we were speaking to had no idea who he was', then we should address their ignorance, not strike Merton from the record. With regards to 'the details of the searching at the end of his life', we actually know a lot more than we know of many other guides in the faith tradition. Br Patrick Hart, for example, recalls some of Merton's correspondence from Asia, just days before his death:

In one of the earliest letters I received from him (ie Merton) after his departure, he referred to some rumors which had already reached him: 'Give my regards to all the gang and I hope there are not too many crazy rumors. Keep telling everyone that I am a monk of Gethsemani and intend to remain one all my days . . .' Later, in a letter from New Delhi, dated November 9, 1968, just a month before his death, Thomas Merton wrote in part: 'I hope I can bring back to my monastery something of the Asian wisdom with which I am fortunate to be in contact'.[xxvi]

One of Merton's many writing projects, in the early sixties, was to take some existing translations of the classic sayings of Chuang Tzu and present them in his own personal versions. He records the story of a disciple who complains to the master Keng San:

However hard I try,

Tao is only a word in my ear.

It does not ring any bells inside.

Keng San sends the disciple to see Lao Tzu:

The disciple got some supplies,

Travelled seven days and seven nights

Alone,

And came to Lao Tzu.

Lao asked: 'Do you come from Keng?'

'Yes,' replied the student.

'Who are all those people you have brought with you?'

The disciple whirled around to look.

Nobody there. Panic![xxvii]

A feature of life at the beginning of the second millennium is a marked sense of disconnection from the past. This is epitomised – and accentuated – every time adults have to get their pre-school grandchildren to work the

computer or the mobile phone! In the eyes of many, especially the young, the pre-digital world does not seem to hold much relevance.

That is a dangerous assumption. We are historical beings. As Lao Tzu suggests, we bring a whole lot of people with us into the present and that can be destructive if we are not aware of their presence and influence. Remembering well – honouring those people and critiquing them as appropriate – is essential to our identity and our sanity.[xxviii] Remembering well is also an essential part of begetting the future well. This is especially true for those of us who believe the promise: 'I shall be with you!'[xxix] That promise is expressed in and through many people and events in history. We can see it and hear it in Thomas Merton. His life and writings bear witness to Pope Paul VI's words:

Through the Holy Spirit the Gospel penetrates to the heart of the world, for it is the Spirit who causes people to discern the signs of the times – signs willed by God – which evangelization reveals and puts to use within history.[xxx]

"This I would call communion"

Our being baptized into Christ[xxxi] places our lives on an ultimate footing. All that is instrumental and relative finds its true meaning in the context of the ultimate. We could say it another way. The more we are experientially identified with Jesus Christ, the more we will find ourselves inclined to put the prefix 'trans' in front of our various structures and institutions. So we will become 'trans-historical', 'trans-cultural', 'trans-political', 'trans-ethnic', 'trans-societal' and even 'trans-religious'.

This is not to say that we cease to be beings that are historical, cultural etc. Far from it. It is to recognize that "every socially defined 'nomos' is an area of meaning carved out of a vast mass of meaninglessness".[xxxii] Human beings need to fabricate social structures and institutions in the face of the incomprehensible and uncontrollable mystery that is existence. Those social structures and institutions are not ultimate however, they are means not ends. They are necessary fictions that enable us to remain somewhat sane as we turn up for daily for life.

These means serve us well when they enable us to encounter the mystery. They serve us badly and can be death-dealing when they become ends instead of means and block our way to the mystery.

The Christian finds his or her identity and security in Christ. The Christian does not reject history or culture or politics or any other necessary human fiction. The Christian engages these fictions intelligently and compassionately as a liberated individual. Through the Christian the Kingdom transforms the human reality, from top to bottom, from the depth dimension to the most superficial facts. St Paul reminds the community in Galatia of his:

As many of you as were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus.[xxxiii]

On his way to Bangkok, in October 1968, Merton was scheduled to give a talk to representatives of ten world religions in Calcutta.[xxxiv] It was part of a four-day conference for discussion and dialogue under the theme "The Relevance of Religion in the Modern World". Merton wrote substantial notes for that presentation but gave an informal talk instead.[xxxv] In the notes for the presentation, Merton writes specifically of communication between monks of varying traditions, but in fact speaks to and of us all:

(The monk) must be wide open to life and to new experience because he has fully utilized his own tradition and gone beyond it. This will permit him to meet a discipline of another, apparently remote and alien tradition, and find a common ground of verbal understanding with (the other). The 'postverbal'[xxxvi] level will then, at least ideally, be that on which they both meet beyond their own words and their own understanding in the silence of an ultimate experience which might conceivably not have occurred if they had not met and spoken . . .

This I would call 'communion'. I think it is something that the deepest ground of our being cries out for, and it is something for which a lifetime of striving would not be enough.[xxxvii]

Is this not prophetic? Does it not call us back to the essence of the Gospel and the Kingdom? Does it not challenge us to reflect on the prejudices that we all carry in our hearts, the bigotries that tear communities apart, the selfishness, fear and vanity that lead us into conflict with each other? Does it not remind us that what matters in the end is not the fictions we have devised to shield us from over-exposure to the mystery but the mystery itself?

"Not survival but prophecy"

There is no doubt in my mind that Merton's whole life was prophetic and his writings reflect this repeatedly. When the eminent Benedictine historian, Jean Leclercq, invited Merton to speak on Marxism at the Bangkok conference in 1968, Merton wrote to Leclercq:

The vocation of the monk in the modern world, especially Marxist, is not survival but prophecy.[xxxviii]

Jean Leclercq believed that Merton ranked with prophetic monks like St Jerome, St Peter Damian and St Bernard in monastic history. He quotes Merton himself:

But one thing is certain, if the contemplative, the monk, the priest, the poet merely forsake their vestiges of wisdom and join in the triumphant empty-handed crowing of advertising men and engineers of opinion, then there is nothing left in store for us but total madness.[xxxix]

In December 1967 Merton gave a retreat to a group of contemplative nuns at Gethsemani. What he says in that conference nearly fifty years ago is as fresh and relevant now as it was then:

Presence is what counts. It's important to realise that the Church itself is presence and so is the contemplative life. Community is presence, not an institution. We've been banking on the ability to substitute institution for the reality of presence, and it simply won't work.[xl]

Later in the same conference he speaks of the importance of silence in giving words whatever witness value they might have:

To come to a place where silence exists, to realise there are people who are content to listen and to live in silence impresses people today who are not at all impressed by mere words. It isn't that words or preaching is (sic) bad. It is just that people don't want to hear anymore words. In our mechanical age, all words have become alike, they've all been reduced to the level of the commercial. To say 'God is love' is like saying 'Eat Wheaties'.[xli]

"I have only begun to seek the questions"

In 1967 Pope Paul VI wrote to Dom Francis Decroix, abbot of the Cistercian monastery of Frattocchie near Rome, requesting him to consult with his order and develop a "message of contemplatives to the world." Dom Francis, in a letter of August 14 1967 to Merton, requested a statement of his thoughts by the end of the month. Merton wrote his statement on August 21, the very day he received the abbot's letter. Before he posted that letter, he wrote a second and sent them together on August 22 as his response. They come down to us as "A Letter on the Contemplative Life".[xlii]

I conclude with some words from Merton's response to Dom Francis – something of a farewell statement really:

Can I tell you that I have found answers to the questions that torment the (people) of our time? I do not know if I have found answers. When I first became a monk, yes, I was more sure of 'answers'. But as I grow old in the monastic life and advance further into solitude, I become aware that I have only begun to seek the questions. My (brothers and sisters), perhaps in my solitude I have become as it were an explorer for you, I have been summoned to explore a desert area of (the human heart) in which explanations no longer suffice, and in which one learns that only experience counts. An arid, rocky, dark land of the soul, sometimes illuminated by strange fires which (we) fear and peopled by spectres which (we) studiously avoid except in (our) nightmares. And in this area I have learned that one cannot truly know hope unless (one) has found out how like despair hope is. The language of Christianity has said this for centuries in other less naked terms. But the language of Christianity has been so used and so misused that sometimes you distrust it: you do not know whether or not behind the word 'cross' there stands the experience of mercy and salvation, or only the threat of punishment. If my word means anything to you, I can say to you that I have experienced the cross to mean mercy and not cruelty, truth and not deception; that the news of the truth and love of Jesus is indeed the true good news, but in our time it speaks out in strange places. And perhaps it speaks out in you more than it does in me; perhaps Christ is nearer to you than he is to me. This I say without shame or guilt because I have learned to rejoice that Jesus is in the world in people who know Him not, that He is at work in them when they think themselves far from Him, and it is my joy to tell you to hope though you think that for you of all (people) hope is impossible. Hope not because you think you can be good, but because God loves us irrespective of our merits and whatever is good in us comes from His love, not from our own doing. Hope because Jesus is with those who are poor and outcast and perhaps despised even by those who should seek them and care for them more lovingly because they act in God's name No one on earth has reason to despair of Jesus, because Jesus

loves (people), loves (them) in (their) sin, and we too must love (people) in (their) sin.[xliii]

[i] Merton began his studies at Colombia in February 1935.

[ii] Thomas Merton, *The Seven Storey Mountain*, A Harcourt Brace Modern Classic, 1948/1976, 175-176.

[iii] *Ibid.*

[iv] *Op cit*, 176.

[v] *Op cit*, 180.

[vi] *Op cit*, 180-181.

[vii] *Op cit*, 180-181.

[viii] *Op cit*, 183-184.

[ix] Kim Mahood, *Craft for a Dry Lake*, Anchor, 2000, 26.

[x] Thomas Merton, *New Seeds of Contemplation*, New Directions, 1962, 31-32. In another place Merton writes: "We retain in our free wills the power to turn our whole being towards life rather than towards death. It depends on us to make ourselves real or unreal. Our vocation is to become what we are meant to be implies therefore a trial of our will, a test in which we are questioned by God and make known our own free option. Our whole life is likely to be that test, and when we die we enter into his presence and give our answer – the answer that we have formulated by all the choices implied in the life that we have been living." (*The New Man*, Burns & Oates, 1961, 126.) Merton echoes those famous words of St Augustine: "Behold you were within me, while I was outside: it was there that I sought you, and, a deformed creature, rushed headlong upon these things of beauty which you have made. You were with me but I was not with you." (*Confessions*, Book 10, Chapter 27)

[xi] See Thomas Merton, *The Seven Storey Mountain*, *op cit*, especially from the beginning of Part II, "With a great price", 187ff.

[xii] *Seven Storey Mountain*, *op cit*, 234.

[xiii] *Op cit*, 250. Later he is to write: "From the very beginning it is evident that the most fundamental question raised by Baptism is a (our) true identity. When (adults) present (themselves) for Baptism (and the baptismal rite was originally framed for adults), (they are) supposed to have entered within (themselves), to have struggled as far as (they) could to dispel all (their) illusions about (themselves), to come to some rough answer to the questions: 'Who do I think I am? What do I think I am doing? and Why do I think I am doing it?'" *The New Man*, Burns & Oates, 1961/1964, 149. See this whole essay, "Sacramental Illumination" for a reflection on Baptism. This is why, in an earlier essay in that same book, Merton could write: "Christianity is more than an ethical system Jesus not only teaches us the Christian life, He creates it in our souls by the action of the Spirit. Our life in him is not a matter of mere ethical goodwill. It is not a mere moral perfection. It is an entirely new spiritual reality, an inner transformation." ("Life in Christ" in *The New Man*, *op cit*, 116.) See also "Life in Christ" in Thomas Merton, *New Seeds of Contemplation*, A New Directions Book, 1961/2007, 158-166.

[xiv] "A Letter on the Contemplative Life" in Thomas Merton: *Spiritual Master – The Essential Writings*, edited by Lawrence S Cunningham, Paulist Press, 1992, 425. Merton wrote this letter on August 21 1967.

[xv] Thomas Merton, "Is the World a Problem?" in *Contemplation in a World of Action*, *op cit*, 170.

[xvi] *The Asian Journal of Thomas Merton*, *op cit*, 308. See also pages 4-5 above

[xvii] *The Road to Joy: The Letters of Thomas Merton to New and Old Friends*, edited by Robert E Daggy, Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 1989, 118.

[xviii] William H Shannon, *Silent Lamp: The Thomas Merton Story*, Crossroad, 1996, 178.

[xix] *The Seven Storey Mountain*, *op cit*, 417.

[xx] Merton wrote in an era when there was no recognition of the need for inclusive language. Where is it possible in this paper I will make appropriate alterations and put them in brackets.

[xxi] *Love and Living*, edited by Naomi Burton and Br Patrick Hart, 1985, 20 & 21-22.

[xxii] Op cit, 21.

[xxiii] Op cit, 21.

[xxiv] Op cit, 22.

[xxv] Jim Forest, *Living with Wisdom: A Life of Thomas Merton*, Revised edition, Orbis books, 1991, 242.

[xxvi] Patrick Hart OCSO, Foreword to *The Asian Journal of Thomas Merton*, op cit, xxviii.

[xxvii] Thomas Merton, *The Way of Chuang Tzu*, *New Directions*, 1965, 129.

[xxviii] An honest remembering of the history of Australia would be a good thing. See for example Henry Reynolds' *Forgotten War* (University of New South Wales Press, 2013) and Rex A E Hunt, *Why Weren't We Told* (Penguin Books, 2000). I also recommend Miroslav Volf, *The End of Memory: Remembering Rightly in a Violent World*, William B Eerdmans, 2006.

[xxix] Exodus 3:12

[xxx] Pope Paul VI, *Evangelii Nuntiandi* (1976), 75.

[xxxi] See Romans 6:3.

[xxxii] Peter Berger, *The Sociocultural Reality of Religion*, Faber & Faber, 1969, p.24. Cf. See also, Ernest Becker, *The Denial of Death*, Free press, 1973, 47-66.

[xxxiii] Galatians 3:27-28.

[xxxiv] See Michael Mott, *The Seven Mountains of Thomas Merton*, A Harvest Book, 1984, 544.

[xxxv] The texts of both may be found in *The Asian Journal of Thomas Merton*, *New Directions*, 1973, Appendix III and IV.

[xxxvi] In one of his journal entries (February 19 1967 in *Learning to Love: The Journals of Thomas Merton*, Volume Six 1966-1967, edited by Christine Bochen, Harper Collins, 1997, 200) Merton wrote: "What is best is what is not said". Merton is here recalling a comment made to him by the Sufi mystic, Sidi Abdeslam, in a letter of February 14, 1967. The idea is not entirely new to Merton. In a journal entry on December 14, 1940, he reflects on poetry and the writings of St Bonaventure and speaks of "keeping hid that which cannot be told." (*Run to the Mountain*, *The Journals of Thomas Merton*, Volume One, 1939-1941, edited by Patrick Hart, Harper Collins, 1995, 279.)

[xxxvii] *The Asian Journal of Thomas Merton*, op cit, 315-316. When Merton gave the informal presentation, he deviated quite markedly from the notes he had made, except in this matter of how we arrive at 'communion'. He said in that informal presentation: "The deepest level of communication is not communication, but communion. It is wordless. It is beyond words, and it is beyond speech, and it is beyond concept. Not that we discover a new unity. We discover an older unity. My dear brothers, we are already one. But we imagine that we are not. And what we have to recover is our original unity. What we have to be is what we are." (Thomas Merton, *The Asian Journal of Thomas Merton*, *New Directions*, 1975, 308.)

[xxxviii] Thomas Merton, *The School of Charity: Letters on Religious Renewal and Spiritual Direction*, edited by Brother Patrick Hart OCSO, A Harvest/HBJ Book, 1990, 392.

[xxxix] Cited in John Eudes Bamberger OCSO, *Thomas Merton: Prophet of Renewal*, Cistercian Publications, 2005, 13.

[xl] Thomas Merton – *The Springs of Contemplation: A Retreat at the Abbey of Gethsemani*, Ave Maria Press, 1992, 17.

[xli] Ibid. Some eight years later Pope Paul VI was to echo this same thought in his encyclical: "Modern people listen more willingly to witnesses than to teachers, and if they do listen to teachers, it is because they are witnesses." (*Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 41.)

[xlii] There is a quotation from "this" letter above – see footnote 15.

[xliii] Thomas Merton *Spiritual Master*, op cit, 424-25