

TRADITIONS OF SPIRITUAL GUIDANCE

Thomas Merton as spiritual guide

THE EXPRESSION 'spiritual guide' suggests what in the east is called a 'guru' and in the west is called a 'spiritual director'. In fact, spiritual direction can take place several ways—with a group or one-to-one, in person, by phone or by letter. In order to be this guide for others in their journey to God, with God, Thomas Merton had to let himself be guided by the Holy Spirit acting directly through interior movements and indirectly through other people. Surely Merton's childhood years moving around with his father were years of loneliness and yet a development of gifts. This loneliness seems to have been gradually transformed into solitude as Merton let himself be guided by his own search for the meaning and purpose of life, his own search for God. His hunger for human intimacy seems to have been quenched only by his hunger for intimacy with God.

He became a spiritual guide for the Trappist scholastics and novices, for an anonymous public for whom he wrote books, and for countless people with whom he communicated in person and in letters. Part of his growth as a spiritual guide springs from his innate attentiveness to the movements of the Spirit in his own life. He was a man who was vitally in touch with his own experience of God, with the story of Jesus written into his life. Part of this development came about through his careful reading of, reflection upon, and dialogue with the writings of spiritual guides in different traditions. And part of this development took place during the hermitage years. What characterized this development? What was important to Merton?

I summarize several views that Merton had, indicating how much springs from his own lived experience. These aspects are solitude as necessity, self-acceptance as integration, contemplation as seeking God's will and finding God's mercy, spiritual direction as growth in interior freedom and peace as touchstone.

Solitude as necessity

One of Merton's convictions which has become my own is his insistence that solitude is not a luxury but a necessity. He was drawn not to an active apostolate, but to monasticism, one way in which loneliness is slowly transformed into solitude by the power of the Spirit. He often associated solitude with Mary, the Mother of God, calling her Our Lady of Solitude.¹ For years he anguished whether to choose a more austere

form of monastic solitude by joining the Carthusians, but he was dissuaded by his superiors.² One of his lifelong struggles was trying to integrate his vocation to be a monk with his vocation to be a writer, both solitary occupations. His first abbot, Dom Frederic, welcomed his talents for writing and ordered him under obedience to write. Merton wrote poems and books about Roman Catholicism, spirituality, and his life as a Trappist monk.

He concentrates on his desire for solitude in *The sign of Jonas*, which describes his priestly ordination. He calls poverty a function of solitude and claims that rejoicing in our imperfections is the only way to true solitude. He talks about taking time for prolonged prayer alone. He writes forcibly of the essence of a solitary vocation as being a vocation to fear, anguish, helplessness, isolation in the invisible God. He then goes on to write about the relationship between solitude and dependence on God, emptiness, silence, love and the solitude of God. In writing of the necessity of silence, he distinguishes inner and outer silence. He ends by relating solitude to compassion, in particular, to Christ's compassion, for example, the way Jesus was strengthened in solitude to nourish and respond to others, to the hungry crowd who came to hear him speak.³

Toward the end of his life, he kept asking for and finally got permission to live in a hermitage on the monastery grounds. He went to this hermitage to be, to be himself, to live as God wanted him to live with his love of God and of people, with his strengths and weaknesses. This hermitage was, I think, a symbol of who Merton really was since he was most himself alone before God. He would be there a few hours before the solitude would again bring him back to his centre, to the truth of his being. Here he felt that his life as a writer and his life as a monk were integrated in this little house which held his rows of books and witnessed his hours of listening to God. Notice he did not seek solitude to escape, but to find community at a deeper level.

In *Conjectures of a guilty bystander*, Merton is adamant that solitude is to be preserved as a necessity not a luxury.⁴ In order to be true to ourselves, we must say 'no' since people are constantly trying to use us to help them foster the illusions by which they live. I wonder here if Merton is perhaps talking to himself. In fact, I would call this freedom for solitude his metaphor of the interior life, his image of contemplation, his notion of interiority. In her biography of Merton, Monica Furlong calls solitude 'a form of essential nutrition to him'.⁵

Another image of interiority which he uses is the French expression *le point vierge*. Merton serves as a powerful spiritual guide through his insights into the value of solitude and surrender. *Le point vierge* is, for Merton, that point of our dependence on God which is deeper than our desires, and freer than our fantasies.⁶ I consider *le point vierge* Merton's principle of unity in interpreting his own life journey to God.

Self-acceptance as integration

Merton's life has been described a number of ways. He called his own life story *The seven storey mountain*. Michael Mott called it *The seven mountains of Thomas Merton*.⁷ One way that is particularly telling is the title of a segment of Merton's monastic journals which he calls *The sign of Jonas*. The whale represents the solitude in which he came to discover and accept his monastic identity. Merton identified with Jonas who also avoided his vocation for a long time.⁸

Merton was a complex man with a humble openness to growth. He made some serious mistakes in his life but let them become learning experiences, opportunities for reflection and improvement. When he was a university student at Cambridge, England, he fathered a child illegitimately and realized years later how little he had integrated his needs for intimacy with his sexuality. This same issue surfaced again the last years of his life when he fell in love with a nurse at a hospital in Louisville. He realized painfully that he still had to go through stages of his own emotional adolescence.⁹ His hunger for human intimacy seems to have been quenched only by the hunger for intimacy with God.

For whatever reasons, Merton's growth in self-acceptance was a lifelong struggle. Moments of self-acceptance were therapeutic and freeing for him as they are for us. He was a man with a high need for independence and at the same time a high need for interdependence. I tend to agree with John Eudes Bamberger that Merton was not cut out to be a full-time hermit.¹⁰ Rather his own needs to love and be loved concretely kept him relating to the world and to his fellow monks. He might have done better to go for stretches to the hermitage, but then to keep up more consistent contact with the monastic community.

In *Conjectures of a guilty bystander*, Merton writes that the actual Christian task is 'accepting ourselves as we are in our confusion, infidelity, disruption, ferment, and even desperation'.¹¹ He writes this in the context of reflecting on the breakdown of western culture and the problem of racism. Hence he is writing not only about individual self-acceptance but corporate, ethnic, national, global self-acceptance.

Contemplation as seeking God's will and finding God's mercy

For Merton, contemplation has to do with seeking, finding and doing God's will. One could say that every book he wrote is about contemplation because every book he wrote is about seeking, finding and doing God's will. But notice what he means by God's will. It is not an exterior command that goes against the grain or a rote form of behaviour. Rather God's will is intimately connected with the truth of our identity in God. We see this first in *The seven storey mountain* in which Merton traces his journey to God. In *The sign of Jonas*, we are dealing with a different Merton, not the prodigal son who has squandered his fortune on wine,

women and song, but a serious monk preparing for ordination to priesthood. And what does this step mean to him? It means a contemplative experience of doing God's will: 'My priestly ordination was, I felt, the one great secret for which I had been born'.¹²

In *New seeds of contemplation*, Merton uses the poetic metaphor of 'seeds' to describe sources or touchstones of contemplation and of seeking God's will.¹³ In Chapter 3 he writes, 'Every moment and every event of our life on earth plants something in our soul . . . every expression of the will of God is in some sense a "word" of God and therefore a "seed" of new life'. He goes on to speak of 'the possibility of an uninterrupted dialogue with God' not as continuous chatter at God but rather as 'a dialogue of deep wills'. He views the will of God as 'an interior invitation of personal love' which implies 'a kind of death to our exterior self'. Perpetuating the metaphor he adds further on: 'if I were looking for God, every event and every moment would sow, in my will, grains of God's life that would spring up one day in a tremendous harvest'. He goes on to clarify that not everything we are and do is of God. Unfocused energy is not God's will, pressured work is not God's will. Things in their identity are God's will, for example, the tree giving glory to God by being a tree. God's will means being ourselves and becoming ourselves. Returning to his dominant metaphor, Merton writes: '*The seeds that are planted in my liberty at every moment, by God's will, are the seeds of my own identity, my own reality, my own happiness, my own sanctity*'.¹⁴ Since the secret of our identity is hidden in the love and mercy of God, he urges us to pray for our own discovery. And is this not the thread of Merton's own life, his own struggle to find himself, his own search for his true self in God?

We see in Merton's later writings that he expands his reflections from the individual search for God's will to the corporate, national, global search for God's will. And I believe this insight enables him to enter into meaningful dialogue with other religions. Merton returns to this theme when he writes: "'God's will" is certainly found in anything that is required of us in order that we may be united with one another in love'.¹⁵ In this same section, he insists on the intimate connection between contemplation and the experience of God's mercy.

Contemplation for Merton, then, has everything to do with seeking God's will and experiencing God's mercy. It is not removed from the reality and demands of our daily lives. Rather it opens us to receive and share life as a gift, a dimension that can only be appreciated by faith.

In his book called *Contemplative prayer*,¹⁶ Merton uses the desert as an image of contemplation. Even though we may live in a community with others, we are bound to explore the inner waste of our own being. Notice that he has shifted the metaphor for contemplation here—not 'seeds of contemplation' which speak of fertility and life-giving hope, but rather

'the desert' which speaks of waste and inner dread. In a way, he has shifted seasons from the verdure of spring and summer to the stripping of autumn and winter. To recognize and describe these seasons of the heart is a service he renders us as spiritual guide, to acknowledge that none of us knows only the fullness of consolation or only the emptiness of desolation.

In chapter 2, he writes about 'prayer of the heart' whereby we seek God present in the depths of our being and meet God by invoking the name of Jesus in faith, wonder and love. He is careful to observe that in this kind of prayer, we seek our roots in the very ground of our being, not merely in our mind or affections. In this observation, he leads us as spiritual guide beyond the intellectual or psychological analysis of our problems to the integrating acceptance of the mystery at the heart of our lives, to gratitude for the gift-dimension of our lives. In light of this, we may be heartened that prayer operates at a level deeper than our consciousness, deeper than our psyche. It is simpler than thought or feeling. It operates at the level of the heart. In the desert tradition, the heart is a source-word. It is the place where God and the demons do battle. Merton describes the heart in the following way:

It refers to the deepest psychological ground of one's personality, the inner sanctuary where self-awareness goes beyond analytical reflection and opens out into metaphysical and theological confrontation with the Abyss of the unknown yet present—one who is 'more intimate to us than we are to ourselves' (To adopt the phrase from Augustine's *Confessions*).¹⁷

In chapter 4, Merton shows himself to be an astute spiritual guide when he goes about naming different obstacles to prayer—presumption, spiritual inertia, confusions, coldness, lack of confidence and discouragement: 'Meditation has no point and no reality unless it is firmly rooted in life'. What does he mean by that? Not separation from loved ones, austere penances and long hours of prayer, in and of themselves. But rather respect for the concrete realities of everyday life: nature, our body, our work, our friends and our surroundings.

In chapter 6, Merton demonstrates his balance as spiritual guide by indicating the close connection between liturgy and contemplative prayer: 'Liturgy by its very nature tends to prolong itself in individual contemplative prayer, and mental prayer in its turn disposes us for and seeks fulfillment in liturgical worship'. He stands in the tradition of monastic spiritual guides about the relationship between prayer and work, between contemplation and action, for example, Basil, Gregory the Great, Bernard of Clairvaux and Peter of Celles. Instead of launching into a monologue on what contemplative prayer means to him, Merton, like a competent

spiritual guide, invites the reader to review the history of this connection in the Christian monastic tradition. To be a competent spiritual guide today, it is not enough to be someone of the now generation, conversant only with the latest trend or fad in spirituality, whether that be transcendental meditation, yoga, guided imagery, Myers-Briggs or the Enneagram. One needs a solid grounding in the history and theology of Christian spirituality in order to help people name their experience of God in the context of other people's religious experience.

In chapter 11, Merton sets out to describe the 'prayer of the heart' in a little more detail:

yearning for the simple presence of God, for a personal understanding of God's word, for knowledge of God's will, and for capacity to hear and obey God. It is thus something much more than uttering petitions for good things external to our own deepest concerns.

A true spiritual guide mediates interior freedom, a freedom from inordinate attachments, a freedom for the loving service of God and God's people. In chapter 11, he argues that meditation is not a matter merely of reflecting on one's place in the universe:

We should let ourselves be brought naked and defenseless into the centre of that dread where we stand alone before God in our nothingness, without explanation, without theories, completely dependent upon God's providential care, in dire need of the gift of God's grace, God's mercy and the light of faith.

Merton views this experience of dread as crucial to a life of contemplative prayer. It is, as it were, the paschal mystery of the contemplative who lets go of needs and fears, in order to receive gratefully the mystery of God's gift of self. The price of this letting go is self-denial and sacrifice. He is careful to clarify that interior freedom does not mean a passive indifference about what happens or a contempt for creatures, but rather a discerning choice about what will help us best to do God's will. Here we can call his spirituality holistic, rooted in the earth and nature.

In chapter 14, Merton as spiritual guide grants that theology is a necessary accompaniment to a life of prayer. At the same time, however, he insists that meditation does not merely help us know certain ideas about God, but enables us to know God. At this point, he invokes other spiritual guides who write of the darkness which alone enables us to be taught by faith—John of the Cross on the dark night, John Chrysostom on the incomprehensibility of God and Gregory of Nyssa on the mystical night. In this context, Merton continues as our spiritual guide when he

writes that our knowledge of God is paradoxically a knowledge not of God as the object of our scrutiny, but of ourselves utterly dependent on God's saving and merciful knowledge of us. The dread opens us to the darkness, which in turn opens us to our own dependence on God's tender mercies.

Once again, Merton sets a balance, this time between his reflections on darkness and unknowing, and his reflections on light, knowledge of God and aesthetic awareness. He reminds us that all religions have ways of integrating the senses into prayer. In fact, he quotes John of the Cross, the spiritual guide who writes so powerfully about the dark night of the soul, who also writes poignantly about the living flame of love.

Merton gives us an inscape into the frontiers of his own interior life when he writes at the beginning of Chapter 15: 'Contemplative prayer is, in a way, simply the preference for the desert, for emptiness, for poverty'. He does not guide us through the desert; he merely points the way. He does not insist that the desert is the only way to contemplative prayer; he merely invites the reader not to be afraid to experience this calling. Actually, he tells us precious little about his own prayer. On the other hand, how could he have written this except from his own life experience, his own faith experience? He spells this out more concretely later in the chapter:

The contemplative way is, in fact, not a way. Christ alone is the way, and he is invisible. The 'desert' of contemplation is simply a metaphor to explain the state of emptiness which we experience when we have left all ways, forgotten ourselves and taken the invisible Christ as our way.

He pushes on to a deeper dimension of the dread experienced by the contemplative, not only the desert of our unknowing but also the blindness of our brokenness, the alienation that exists between the ego and God, the basic poverty of our sinfulness. Again, Merton artfully encourages us to view this experience of dread as purification not as punishment. He sees the positive way that dread can help us relativize the seriousness with which we view our progress in the spiritual life:

Dread is an expression of our insecurity in this earthly life, a realization that we are never and can never be completely 'sure' in the sense of possessing a definitive and established spiritual status.

In chapter 18, he regards this experience of poverty as a vital dimension of our Christ-consciousness, as an essential aspect of our living the paschal

mystery existentially, as an essential prerequisite to celebrating the paschal mystery liturgically. This poverty is our powerlessness:

Dread divests us of the sense of possession, of 'having' our being and our power to love, in order that we may simply be in perfect openness (turned inside out), a defenselessness that is utter simplicity and total gift.

His readings in desert spirituality, psychology and Eastern spirituality led him to focus on the gap between the false self and the real self, a theme of his book on *The new man*.¹⁸ He was very concerned about the growth of one's real self and this self he called Christ. In a letter to Dr. Suzuki, world-renowned for his writings on Zen Buddhism, he writes: 'The Christ we seek is within us. In our inmost self, is our inmost self, and yet infinitely transcends ourselves. We have to be "found in him" and yet be perfectly ourselves and free from the domination of any image of him other than himself'.¹⁷

Spiritual guidance as growth in interior freedom

In his little book called *Spiritual direction and meditation*, Merton describes what he means by spiritual direction.²⁰ He calls it a continuous process of formation and guidance, in which Christians are led and encouraged in our special vocation, so that by faithful correspondence to the graces of the Holy Spirit, we may attain to the particular end of our vocation and to union with God. It is spiritual guidance, not merely ethical, social or psychological. The spiritual guide focuses on the life of the whole person, not merely the life of the mind or of the heart. According to Merton, the purpose of spiritual direction is to penetrate beneath the surface of our lives, to get behind the persona that we present to the world, and to evoke our inner freedom and truth which is the likeness of Christ in us. The function of the spiritual guide is to validate and to affirm what is truly spiritual in the person. Part of this function is to help others discern the movements of the spirits, to help them sort out which inspirations come from the spirit of evil and which from the Holy Spirit. Another part of this function is to enable another to recognize and follow the inspirations of the Holy Spirit in everyday life. A spiritual guide creates an informal, trusting atmosphere in which a person can feel known and understood. As spiritual guides, we cannot give to others what we do not ourselves possess. Spiritual direction is necessarily personal. How can we best take advantage of spiritual direction?

What we need to do is bring the director into contact with our real self, as best we can, and not fear to let him see what is false in our false self. Now this right way implies a relaxed, humble

attitude in which we let go of ourselves, and renounce our unconscious efforts to maintain a facade.²¹

We try to speak our own inner truth to our spiritual guide. In this way we reveal our inner self, our real self, who we are in the eyes of God. Such candid and profound self-revelation is only possible in an atmosphere of sincerity and simplicity. Merton cautions that in our eagerness to become 'mystics,' we can take our prayer too seriously. A contemplative, on the other hand, takes God seriously, hungers for truth, and tries to live simply. A good spiritual guide can balance excessive asceticism not with an overdose of sociability but rather with the simplicity and satisfaction of an ordinary life lived at a humane pace.

Merton distinguishes clearly between a spiritual guide and a psychoanalyst. He warns that spiritual directors need not become pseudo-therapists by delving into emotional problems and unconscious drives. At the same time, they can acknowledge when they are beyond their depth and refer their directees to someone trained in psychology.

Let us see Thomas Merton as spiritual guide at work in his essay on 'What is meditation?' He begins by describing meditation as unitive and loving knowledge. Its distinctive characteristic is that it is 'a search for truth which springs from love and which seeks to possess the truth not only by knowledge but also by love'. He notes the difficulty of integrating emotions into our life of prayer. Some find their prayer is dry and seems to bear no fruit, so they give up. Others are always emoting in prayer and then start equating its success with the intensity of their feelings. Both are extremes to be avoided: 'The proper atmosphere of meditation is one of tranquillity and peace and balance'. In a section called 'How to meditate', our spiritual guide enumerates certain basic helps. An ongoing recollection not only during prayer but during the day implies resistance to the appeals which society makes to our senses. Second, a sense of our poverty and nothingness in God's sight is so key that sometimes we only learn our real need for God through suffering. Third, leisure is very important in the life of prayer. By this he means not idleness or laziness but times of silence between work and formal prayer. Fourth, sincerity helps us pray and admit when we do not feel like praying and may start out of routine. Fifth, progress in the life of prayer comes with concentrating on union with God. Sixth, the choice of a subject for prayer is also significant since meditation is meant to help us see and experience the mysteries of the life of Christ as real in our own daily lives. In fact, he adds that unless we meditate on the extermination camps of Dachau and Auschwitz as well as on the passion of Christ, we have not yet fully experienced Christianity in our day. He considers the essentials of meditative prayer to be a sincere effort at recollection, the attempts to focus on what we are meditating about, the desire to live what we come

to see and communion. He concludes by summarizing what he means by meditation: 'the idea of awakening our interior self and attuning ourselves inwardly to the Holy Spirit, so that we will be able to respond to His grace'.

Merton insists on the necessity of spiritual direction for those trying to deepen their life of prayer, as a way of helping us discern the movements of the spirit and as a way of cutting through our blindness. He is clear that the task of the spiritual guide is not to teach a method for attaining exotic experiences, but to help us recognize God's grace and the barriers that keep us from becoming prayerful people.²² Notice how this task differs from that of the therapist who helps us analyze the roots of our behaviour and the projections in our relationships. It differs also from that of the pastoral counsellor who helps us integrate our relationship with ourselves, others and God. The spiritual guide is interested primarily in helping us deepen and develop our relationship with God.

Out of his struggle, he was given a wonderful empathy with others struggling with their identity. He seemed, if you will, scandal-proof. Ernesto Cardenal, a former novice under Merton who later founded a Christian lay community called Solentiname in Nicaragua, witnesses to this empathy. When Cardenal as a novice would come to Merton for spiritual direction, Merton would ask him about his country and poets and politics, everything that Cardenal had thought he had to renounce. In this way, Merton gradually led him to accept all of his interests and concerns as part of himself that were to be treasured and transformed for the glory of God and the service of others.²³

Peace as touchstone

Merton looked for deep peace in himself and in others as the infallible sign of God's action. Perhaps one of the first people for whom Tom Merton was a spiritual guide was his own brother John Paul, whom Tom helped to prepare for baptism shortly before his death during the war. He remarked that after his brother's baptism, John Paul looked quiet, happy, completely serene.²⁴

Connected with this is his own call in the later years of his life to work prophetically for peace and justice in the world. He connected with Dan Berrigan, S.J., Joan Baez, Jim Forest, and others in the movement in the United States. He wrote books on the topic and was censored for writing what he later circulated privately as his Cold War Letters.

He develops his views in Part 3 of *Conjectures of a guilty bystander*. He recognizes that when he entered the monastery, he felt he had to develop a contempt for the world, but after years in the monastery, he comes to be reconciled with the world, even to the point of being given a mystical experience in Louisville at the corner of Fourth and Walnut (now Mohammed Ali Boulevard), in which he sees deeply, freshly, that we all

belong to God and to each other. This growth opens him up to feel a genuine compassion for people and a concern for their rights and needs. Notice that here again peace is the touchstone of his experience that what is asked of him is not a rejection of the world but rather a response to Christ in the world, in poor and oppressed people, in the few people entrusted to him and in unbelievers.²⁵ Notice, too, that peace is not a cozy copout on the demands of everyday living, but rather the freedom to make a response, to take responsibility.

For Merton as for other contemporary spiritual guides, peace is not only a touchstone of God's action in our personal lives, but the gift of God offered to those who try to live a contemplative lifestyle, a lifestyle that cannot help urging us to search for justice. This search for justice and peace characterizes authentic spirituality.

Concluding remarks

Since Merton's own early life was marked by religious experience rather than by practices of piety, it is understandable that his monastic life was also marked by a quest for the experience of God rather than a preoccupation with ritual. One finds this singleminded concentration in both editions of *Seeds of contemplation*.

Merton's life experience was his own spiritual guide. He joins those whose autobiography is spirituality, whose life story itself reveals God's presence and mystery. The very fact that Merton kept and published so many journals is living testimony to his recognition of this fact. And his attempt to tell his story helped him get in touch with the pattern of God's unique and personal action in his own life and, later on, in the life of the Church and of the world.

After Vatican II, he continued to let life experience be his own spiritual guide. And now his concerns were not only personal, but also local, national, ecclesial, ecumenical and global in scope. Now his life experience was enriched by his dialogue not only with monks of other congregations and traditions, but also with other Christians and unbelievers. It is significant that he died in the east. Somehow he was brought to his journey's end by all he saw and experienced. The spiritual guidance he gave is not only contained in the formal teaching and thought he published in his books, but also in his lifestyle and in the spontaneous responses he made to so many different people in the context of collaboration and friendship through conversations and letters. Many who helped to form his mind and heart were in turn formed by him. Some whom he had helped to form ended up having an impact on his growth and development. In this regard, Merton is prophetic of a mutuality which is characteristic of spiritual direction today.

Thomas Merton as a spiritual guide speaks to me of a personal integrity that kept him faithful to his own search for God. He speaks to me of the

necessity of solitude in nurturing interiority and enabling us to live at *le point vierge* of our being. He speaks to me of the healing power of accepting ourselves as we are, of an integration that includes accepting brokenness, our own and that of others. He speaks to me of contemplation as a way of life that seeks God's will in all and experiences God's tender mercies daily. He speaks to me of spiritual guidance not as directing another to follow fixed norms, but as freeing the other to follow the Holy Spirit. And he speaks to me of the value of peace in making prayerful decisions and choices in faith.

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NOTES

¹ See Merton, Thomas: *The seven storey mountain* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1976), pp 281-282.

² See Merton, Thomas: *The sign of Jonas* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1960), p 27.

³ For his reflections on solitude in *The sign of Jonas*, see pp 27-28, 70-71, 74, 80, 101, 116-177, 234, 243, 260-262, 301-302, 323, 326, 347. See also Merton: 'The inner experience: society and the inner self', *Cistercian Studies*, 18 (1983), 125-126. Cf Teahan, John F.: 'The place of silence in Thomas Merton's life and thought', *Journal of religion*, 61 (1981), 364-383.

⁴ See Merton, Thomas: *Conjectures of a guilty bystander* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1968), pp 96-97.

⁵ See Furlong, Monica: *Merton: a biography* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1980), p 173.

⁶ See Merton: *Conjectures of a guilty bystander*, pp 131-132, 151, 158, 160, 271. I wonder if this point of poverty and nothingness by which we know God which Merton calls *le point vierge* is what Karl Rahner calls the supernatural existential, a given in our existence, the offer of God's gift of self.

⁷ See Mott, Michael: *The seven mountains of Thomas Merton* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1984).

⁸ See Merton: *The sign of Jonas*, pp 329-330, 351-352.

⁹ See Griffin, John Howard: *The hermitage journals: a diary kept while working on the biography of Thomas Merton*, ed. Congar Beasley, Jr. (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday & Co., Image, 1983). See also Griffin: *Follow the ecstasy: Thomas Merton, the hermitage years 1965-1968* (Fort Worth, Texas: JHG Editions, Latitudes Press, 1983), and Mott, pp 435-468.

¹⁰ See Wilkes, Paul, ed.: *Merton by those who knew him best* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1984), pp 119-120.

¹¹ Merton: *Conjectures of a guilty bystander*, p 71.

¹² Merton: *The sign of Jonas*, p 181.

¹³ See Merton: *New seeds of contemplation* (New York: New Directions, 1972).

¹⁴ Merton: *New seeds of contemplation*, p 33.

¹⁵ Merton: *New seeds of contemplation*, p 76.

¹⁶ See Merton: *Contemplative prayer* (Garden City, New York: Image, Doubleday, 1971).

¹⁷ Merton: *Contemplative prayer*, p 33. In my opinion, Karl Rahner goes one step further, by calling the heart the centre of our freedom, the place where we surrender to the mystery of God, the place where Jesus surrendered to the mystery of God. See Callahan, Annice, R.S.C.J.: *Karl Rahner's spirituality of the pierced heart: a reinterpretation of devotion to the Sacred Heart* (Lanham, Md.: University Press of America, 1985), pp 90-100. In chapter 11,

Merton comes closer to Rahner's description of the heart when he writes of his true identity lying hidden in God's call to freedom and his response of using his freedom to love responsibly and authentically.

¹⁸ See Merton: *The new man* (New York: Farrar, Straus, & Giroux, 1978).

¹⁹ See Shannon, William H., ed.: *The hidden ground of love: the letters of Thomas Merton on religious experience and social concerns* (New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 1985), p 564.

²⁰ See Merton: *Spiritual direction and meditation* (Collegeville, Mn.: The Liturgical Press, 1960).

²¹ Merton: *Spiritual direction and meditation*, p 24.

²² See Merton: *Contemplative prayer*, p 36.

²³ See Wilkes: p 36.

²⁴ See Merton: *The seven storey mountain*, pp 397-404.

²⁵ See Merton: *Conjectures of a guilty bystander*, pp 15, 81-83, 97-98, 326.