

## Thomas Merton, Henri Nouwen, and the Living Gospel

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I'd like to begin by quoting one of my favorite authors, Jean-Pierre de Caussade, an eighteenth-century Jesuit, who wrote *Abandonment to Divine Providence*. He wrote these words, which suggested the title for my talk today:

The Holy Spirit writes no more Gospels except in our hearts. All we do from moment to moment is live this new gospel of the Holy Spirit. We, if we are holy, are the paper; our sufferings and our actions are the ink. The workings of the Holy Spirit are his pen, and with it he writes a living gospel.<sup>1</sup>

Thomas Merton and Henri Nouwen are two figures who exemplified this teaching. They were of course both prolific writers. It was said of each of them that they never had an unpublished thought. And curiously, the outpouring of their published thoughts has scarcely been affected by their physical demise.

Thousands, perhaps millions of readers have profited from their writings. But what I would like to suggest is that in both cases, with Merton and Nouwen, we remember them not only for their written books, but for the text they wrote with their lives.

Of course they were both highly personal writers who deliberately held up their life experience as the material for spiritual reflection. But apart from their autobiographical writings, it is the actual *story* of their lives that represents what Caussade called "a living gospel"—a text written, as it were, with their own sufferings, their actions, their desires, and struggles.

For many years—if not my entire life—I have been preoccupied with the lives of holy people. This has resulted, among other things, in several books of my own, beginning with *All Saints*, in which I included both Merton and Nouwen among my list of "saints, prophets, and witnesses for our time."<sup>2</sup>

Sometimes, the people in our own lives are the last we would consider as examples of holiness. We know them all too well. We are aware of their weaknesses and idiosyncrasies. Brother Patrick Hart, Merton's former secretary at the Abbey of Gethsemani, told me that they had recently spent a whole year reading aloud from *All Saints* in the refectory. I said, "Did the monks have any trouble with the people I included as saints?" He said, "Well, there were some eyebrows raised about Thomas Merton."

Certainly, if there is anything I have tried to show in my writings on saints it is that holiness is not the same as genius, moral perfection, or even mental health. It is a quality that is expressed in the process of a life, in a person's total response, over a lifetime, to the divine voice that calls a person ever deeper into the heart of his or her vocation.

To tell their story is more than simply recounting their accomplishments or a list of their publications. It means reading their story in the light of the gospel—endeavoring to discern how their story relates to the story that God tells us through Jesus.

The story of Jesus, it is worth remembering, is not just a list of his teachings or glorious mysteries—whether walking on water or raising Lazarus. It is also a story of brokenness, abandonment, and sorrow. And if we ask, in the case of Jesus, *where is God in this story?* the answer has to be that God is there in the whole story.

The same is true for the saints, whether canonized or not. The story of Merton or Nouwen or any of God's faithful servants is not just a chronicle of their activities and accomplishments. It is a story that takes account of their restless search, their stumbling, their moments of doubt, their quirks and personal qualities. And if we ask, "Where is God in their story?" the answer is that God is part of the whole story.

And whether we realize it or not, the same is true for ourselves.

A friend of mine has served as a Eucharistic minister, bringing communion to the sick. One time she asked a man in the hospital whether he would like to receive communion and he answered, sadly, "I've been pretty far from God." To which she replied: "But I'm sure he hasn't been far from you." The expression on his face showed the immediate impact of those simple words.

But they could be directed to any of us. As we reflect on the living gospel, written in the lives of holy people, we become more adept at reading the signs of grace written in our own story—the signs that reveal God's presence in our own lives, drawing us,

prodding us, toward our true home, even in the times when the thought of God was far from us.

In that light that I would like to reflect a bit on the living gospels of Thomas Merton and Henri Nouwen.

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Let me start with Thomas Merton, whom I never knew in life. He died in 1968 when I was twelve. I didn't discover him until the next year, when I was thirteen. That's when I first discovered his edition of writings by Mahatma Gandhi. I can trace almost everything in my life to that encounter, including my decision, when I was nineteen, to drop out of college and join *The Catholic Worker* here in New York, and my decision five years later to become a Catholic. Like countless other readers, I was swept away by *The Seven Storey Mountain*, and afterward Merton became a constant friend and point of reference in my subsequent journey.

*The Seven Storey Mountain*, the autobiography Merton wrote in his early years as a Trappist monk, told a story—by turns funny and sad—of his search for his true identity and home, beginning with his orphaned childhood and his education in France, England, and eventually around the corner here at Columbia University, where he perfected his pose of cool sophistication, smoking, drinking all night in jazz clubs, and writing novels in the style of James Joyce. He regarded himself as a true man of his age, free of any moral laws beyond his own making, ready to “ransack and rob the world of all its pleasures and satisfactions.” But increasingly his life struck him more as a story of pride and selfishness that brought nothing but unhappiness to himself and others. “What a strange thing!” he wrote, “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.”<sup>3</sup>

Out of this anguish and confusion, Merton found himself drawn by the sense that there must be a deeper end and purpose to existence. All around him the world was tumbling toward war, the ultimate achievement of “Contemporary Civilization.” Meanwhile he was reading Blake, St. Augustine, and medieval philosophy and beginning to suspect that “the only way to live was in a world that was charged with the presence and reality of God.”<sup>4</sup>

It was a short leap from this insight to his reception in the Catholic church—here in this very church of Corpus Christi—and ultimately to the Abbey of Gethsemani in Kentucky. The Trappists

had captured his heart from the first time he read about them in *The Catholic Encyclopedia*. "What wonderful happiness there was, then, in the world! There were still men on this miserably noisy, cruel earth, who tasted the marvelous joy of silence and solitude, who dwelt in forgotten mountain cells, in secluded monasteries, where the news and desires and appetites and conflicts of the world no longer reached them." When he later made a retreat at Gethsemani and there for the first time viewed the silent monks, dressed in their white habits and kneeling in prayer in the chapel, he felt that he had found his true home at last. "This is the center of all the vitality that is in America," he exclaimed.<sup>5</sup>

With the publication of Merton's autobiography, he was suddenly the most famous monk in America. The irony was not lost on him. He had become a Trappist in part to escape the claims of ego, the anxious desire to "be somebody." And yet his superiors felt his writing had something to offer the world and they ordered him to keep at it. And so he did. Yet for all the books he would go on to produce, in the public mind he was eternally fixed at the point where his memoir ended—as a young monk with his cowl pulled over his head, happily convinced that in joining an austere monastic community he had fled the modern world, never to return. It was difficult for readers to appreciate that this picture represented only the beginning of Merton's journey as a monk.

How many readers remember that *The Seven Storey Mountain* ends with a Latin motto: *sit finis libri; non finis quaerendi*—"here the book ends, but not the search"? At least this turned out to be true. Over the next twenty years Merton continued to search and grow more deeply into his vocation and his relationship with Christ. Eventually he reached the point where he would write, with some exasperation, "*The Seven Story Mountain* is the work of a man I never even heard of."<sup>6</sup>

One aspect of the book that he particularly came to regret was the attitude of pious scorn directed at "the world" and its unfortunate citizens. He had seemed to regard the monastery as a secluded haven set apart from "the news and desires and appetites and conflicts" that bedeviled ordinary humanity. Only with time did he realize that "the monastery is not an 'escape' from the world. On the contrary, by being in the monastery I take my true part in all the struggles and sufferings of the world." With this realization his writing assumed an increasingly compassionate and ecumenical tone.

In one of his published journals he described a moment of mystical awareness that marked a critical turning point in his life as a monk. It occurred during an errand into nearby Louisville, "at the corner of Fourth and Walnut, in the center of the shopping district."

I was suddenly overwhelmed with the realization that I loved all those people, that they were mine and I theirs, that we could not be alien to one another even though we were total strangers. It was like waking from a dream of separateness, of spurious self-isolation in a special world, the world of renunciation and supposed holiness.<sup>7</sup>

Merton had discovered a sense of solidarity with the human race—not simply in shared sin, but also in grace. "There is no way of telling people that they are all walking around shining like the sun," he wrote. "There are no strangers! . . . [T]he gate of heaven is everywhere."<sup>8</sup>

No doubt many influences converged in this insight, enabling Merton to break through the limits of a certain narrow religious perspective. And yet it seems clear that this experience in Louisville was a crucial event, a moment in which everyday reality appeared "transfigured" in a way that permanently affected his vision.

For years Merton had devoted creative thought to the meaning of monastic and contemplative life. But from this point on he became increasingly concerned with making connections between the monastery and the wider world. Scorn and sarcasm gave way to compassion and friendship. This was reflected in his writing. Along with the more traditional spiritual books there appeared articles on war, racism, and other issues of the day. Long before such positions were commonplace in the church he was a prophetic voice for peace and nonviolence.

Ironically, this increasing engagement with the world and its problems was accompanied by an increasing attraction to an even more total life of contemplation. In 1965 he was given permission to move into a hermitage on the monastery grounds. There he continued to perfect the delicate balance between contemplative prayer and openness to the world that had become the distinctive feature of his spirituality.

Merton maintained a wide circle of friends. Many of them knew something of the tensions which at times characterized relations with his religious superiors. In the spirit of the 1960s some of them frankly questioned whether his vocation wasn't an anachronism and challenged him to "get with it." In fact, Merton's personal temptations were often in the direction of even greater solitude among the Carthusians or in some other remote setting. But in the end he always returned to the conviction that his best service to the world lay in faithfulness to his monastic vocation and that his spiritual home was at Gethsemani.

In his last year a more flexible abbot did permit Merton to venture forth. In 1968 he accepted an invitation to address an international conference of Christian monks in Bangkok. Merton was particularly excited about the prospect of exploring his deep interest in Eastern spirituality. In this respect, as his journals show, the trip marked a new breakthrough, another wider encounter with the 'gate of heaven' that is everywhere.

In Ceylon, in the presence of the enormous statues of the reclining Buddha at Polonnaruwa, he was "knocked over with a rush of relief and thankfulness at the *obvious* clarity of the figures..." He concluded:

I was suddenly, almost forcibly, jerked clean out of the habitual, half-tied vision of things, and an inner clearness, clarity, as if exploding from the rocks themselves, became evident and obvious...everything is emptiness and everything is compassion.<sup>9</sup>

On December 10 he delivered his talk in Bangkok and afterward retired to his room for a shower and nap. There he was later found dead, apparently electrocuted by the faulty wiring of a fan.

For all his restless searching, he had ended exactly as he had foreseen in the *The Seven Storey Mountain*. The book had concluded with a mysterious speech in the voice of God:

"I will give you what you desire. I will lead you into solitude. ... Everything that touches you shall burn you, and you will draw your hand away in pain, until you have withdrawn yourself from all things. Then you will be all alone.... That you may become the brother of God and learn to know the Christ of the burnt men."<sup>10</sup>

Thomas Merton will probably not be canonized, precisely because he lived out a model of holiness that isn't easily pigeonholed in a prefab Catholic mold. Just recently, the U.S. bishops decided not even to list Merton among a list of exemplary American Catholics to be included in a new catechism for young adults.

And yet I think he represented a type of holiness particularly suited and necessary to our times. Responding to God's call, he let go of his possessions, his ego, even a spurious kind of "supposed holiness"—until he came to rest in God's emptiness and compassion. It is a story of steadily "putting off the old person and putting on Christ"—the same process to which all of us are called—not for the sake of becoming a different person, but for the sake of becoming our true selves.

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As I mentioned, I knew Merton only through his books. Henri Nouwen, on the other hand, is someone I knew very well over a period of twenty years, from my days at *The Catholic Worker* up to the time of his death.

By the time of his passing in 1996 Henri Nouwen had become one of the most popular and influential spiritual writers in the world. His popularity was only enhanced by his willingness to share his own struggles and brokenness. He did not present himself as a "spiritual master," but—like the title of one of his early books—as a "wounded healer." Those who knew him were aware of how deep his wounds ran. He was afflicted by an inordinate need for affection and affirmation; he was beset by anxieties about his identity and self-worth; there seemed to be a void within that could not be filled.

Nouwen had a great gift for friendship and wherever he went he sowed the seeds of community. But still something drove him from one place or project to another—from Holland to America, from Notre Dame to Yale, to a Trappist monastery, to the missions in Latin America, to the idea of serving as chaplain with a traveling circus troupe, to Harvard Divinity School. His lectures at Harvard attracted enormous crowds. But this only underlined his abiding sense of loneliness and isolation. Later he wrote with feeling about the temptations that Christ suffered in the desert: to be "relevant, powerful, and spectacular." Behind all this restlessness was an underlying effort to hear God's voice, to find his true home, and to know where he truly belonged.

At this point there came a great turning point in his life. Over the years Nouwen had visited a number of L'Arche communities in France and Canada. In these communities disabled people live together with able helpers. In 1986 he received a formal invitation from Daybreak, the L'Arche community in Toronto, to become their pastor. It was the first time in his life he had received such a formal call. With trepidation he accepted and Daybreak became his home for the last ten years of his life.

It was unlike anything he had ever known. Nouwen had written extensively about community, but he had never really known community life. A man of great intellectual gifts, he was physically clumsy and was challenged by such everyday tasks as parking a car or making a sandwich. On one of his first days in the house he appeared in the kitchen with a bag of laundry and said "What am I supposed to do with these?" You wash them, was the answer.

Like other members of L'Arche, Nouwen was assigned to care for one of the handicapped residents—in fact, one of the most severely handicapped adults in the community, a young man named Adam, who could not talk or move by himself. Nouwen spent hours each morning simply bathing, dressing, and feeding Adam. Some of his old admirers wondered whether Henri Nouwen was not wasting his talents in such menial duties. But to his surprise he found this an occasion for deep inner conversion. Adam was not impressed by Nouwen's books or his fame or his genius as a public speaker. But through this mute and helpless man, Nouwen began to know what it meant to be "beloved" of God.

This was not, however, the end of his struggles. After his first year at Daybreak Nouwen suffered a nervous breakdown—the culmination of long suppressed tensions. For months he could barely talk or leave his room. Now he was the helpless one, mutely crying out for some affirmation of his existence. As he later described it, "Everything came crashing down—my self-esteem, my energy to live and work, my sense of being loved, my hope for healing, my trust in God . . . everything."<sup>11</sup> It was an experience of total darkness, a "bottomless abyss." During these months of anguish, he often wondered if God was real or just a product of his imagination.

But later he wrote, "I now know that while I felt completely abandoned, God didn't leave me alone."<sup>12</sup> With the support of his friends and intensive counseling he was able to break through,



and to emerge more whole, more at peace with himself. Above all he emerged with a deeper trust in what he called "the inner voice of love," a voice calling him "beyond the boundaries of my short life, to where Christ is all in all."<sup>13</sup>

In the summer of 1996 Nouwen was working hard, struggling to complete five books. To many friends he seemed happier and more relaxed than they had ever seen him—talking with great enthusiasm of his coming sixty-fifth birthday and plans for the future. Thus it came as a great shock when he suddenly died of a heart attack on September 21 while passing through Amsterdam on his way to work on a documentary in St. Petersburg.

There were numerous ironies at play in this death, the culmination of a "sabbatical" year from his work as chaplain to the L'Arche community. Among these was the fact that a man so much afflicted by a sense of homelessness throughout his life should die in his home town, surrounded in the end by his ninety-year-old father and his siblings. The subject of his planned documentary was his favorite painting: Rembrandt's "Return of the Prodigal Son."

But Nouwen's writings from the last years of his life make it clear how much he had contemplated and prepared for this particular homecoming. In one journal entry he wrote, "How much longer will I live? . . . Only one thing seems clear to me. Every day should be well lived. What a simple truth! Still, it is worth my attention. Did I offer peace today? Did I bring a smile to someone's face? Did I say words of healing? Did I let go of my anger and resentments? Did I forgive? Did I love? These are the real questions! I must trust that the little bit of love that I sow now will bear many fruits, here in this world and in the life to come."<sup>14</sup>

In the last months of his life, Nouwen was shaken by a particular death in the Daybreak community. It was Adam, the severely handicapped young man whom he had cared for during the first year after his arrival at Daybreak; Adam, who had helped him learn, so late in his own life, what it means to be "beloved of God." Finally, after a lifetime of illness and disability, Adam had succumbed to his ailments at the age of thirty-four. For the L'Arche community—which regards its handicapped members as its "core"—Adam's death was a devastating loss. Nouwen rushed back to Toronto from his sabbatical to share the grieving of Adam's family and friends.

Compared to, say, Henri Nouwen, Adam had accomplished nothing, not even the routine tasks that most people take for granted. He could not speak, or dress himself, or brush his own teeth. In the eyes of the world the question would not have been why such a man should die but why God had in the first place permitted him to live. And yet Nouwen saw in Adam's life and death a personal reenactment of the gospel story.

Adam was—very simply, quietly, and unquietly—there! He was a person who, by his very life, announced the marvelous mystery of our God: I am precious, beloved, whole, and born of God. Adam bore silent witness to this mystery, which has nothing to do with whether or not he could speak, walk, or express himself . . . It has to do with his being. He was and is a beloved child of God. It is the same news that Jesus came to announce . . . Life is a gift. Each one of us is unique, known by name, and loved by the One who fashioned us.<sup>15</sup>

Jesus too had accomplished relatively little during his short public life. He too had died as a "failure" in the world's eyes. "Still," Nouwen wrote, "both Jesus and Adam are God's beloved sons—Jesus by nature, Adam by 'adoption'—and they lived their sonship among us as the only thing that they had to offer. That was their assigned mission. That is also my mission and yours. Believing it and living from it is true sanctity."<sup>16</sup>

Nouwen set out to write a book about Adam—it would be his last. And, as was the case with all of Nouwen's best writing, it was also about himself. He seemed to sense in the passing of this young man that he was being called to prepare for his own flight into the waiting arms of his Creator. It was as if, he wrote, Adam was saying, "Don't be afraid, Henri. Let my death help you to befriend yours. When you are no longer afraid of your own death, then you can live fully, freely, and joyfully."<sup>17</sup>

It was the voice he had heard before. "Many friends and family members have died during the past eight years and my own death is not so far away. But I have heard the inner voice of love, deeper and stronger than ever. I want to keep trusting in that voice, and be led by it beyond the boundaries of my short life, to where Christ is all in all."<sup>18</sup>

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I first met Henri Nouwen in 1976 when I was managing editor of *The Catholic Worker* here in New York. At the age of twenty, I was not a terribly experienced editor—I was not an experienced anything, for that matter. I knew Henri was a writer of some repute, though I had never read any of his books. So I asked him if he would like to contribute something to the Worker newspaper and he graciously replied by sending me three essays on the subject of community. To be honest, I wasn't too impressed. They struck me as rather abstract. So I said, "Thanks, but do you have anything else?"

He was understandably miffed. "I've just given you three essays," he said. Realizing my gaffe, I hastened to tell him how pleased I would be to publish one of his fine essays, which I did. But he never offered us anything else, and honestly I didn't ask.

Many things happened over the following years, and our paths proceeded on strangely congruent tracks. Our relationship had its ups and downs.

But this early experience was still on his mind, ten years later, when I went to tell him that I had been offered the job as editor-in-chief of Orbis Books. "Well, if someone were to ask me if you would be a good person for this job, I would say, 'Intellectually, nobody better; a perfect fit.' . . . But I don't know whether you have the *human gifts* for that kind of work—being able to work with people, you know."

Our relationship was rather frayed at that point—a reflection in part of my resentment of his yawning neediness, and his frustration that I was not more available as a friend.

Nevertheless, I did become an editor, and Henri and I went on to work productively on several books. Undoubtedly, over time I had come to understand what Henri was talking about. Being an editor isn't just about knowing how to wield a red pencil. It is about relationships, and for Henri relationships were everything. As the years went on our mutual trust and affection grew and deepened.

Eventually he told me that during his sabbatical year he wanted to write a book about the Apostle's Creed. I responded eagerly, and went on to send him a pile of scholarly articles on the subject. He became discouraged. "Wow, this is a lot more complicated than I thought," he said. He wondered whether he could really pull it

off. So it didn't come as a complete surprise when he called to say he wanted to change the focus of his book. I said, okay—what do you have in mind?

"Now hear me out," he said. "It will still be a book about the Creed, but I want to write the book as a biography of Adam."

*Right*, I said cautiously, using my best acquired human skills. I had heard him talk about Adam for years, and I had some idea of what his life and death must mean to Henri. But beyond that I didn't have the slightest idea what he was talking about.

A little time passed and Henri sent me his preliminary draft, and suddenly it became clear what he was doing. He intended to write Adam's story after the pattern of the gospels, beginning with his early years, or hidden life; his experience of the desert of institutional life; the public life and ministry that began when he arrived at L'Arche; his passion, death, and resurrection in the hearts of those who loved him.

At first it seemed peculiar to talk about the public mission of a mute and helpless man who could not perform the basic tasks of caring for himself. And yet Henri perceived that Adam, like Jesus, had a mission in his life. His mission was to bear witness to God's love and to make others aware—as he had for Henri himself—that we are all God's beloved. As was said of Jesus, "Everyone who touched him was healed." Similarly, "Each of us who touched Adam has been made whole somewhere."<sup>19</sup>

Over the next few months we worked closely on the book, exchanging drafts and comments. In August he delivered the final draft in person, coming to my home for dinner. It was the first time my wife had seen him in many years and afterward she remarked, as I had, that he seemed like a different person—as she put it, "so sane," though she might have used other words, like happy, whole, redeemed in some essential way.

I was terribly moved by the evening, and the next day I arranged to have a plaque made with the cover of his book *With Burning Hearts*. I sent it to him in Toronto along with a note, thanking him for his many years of friendship and all his many gifts.

A few weeks later came the news of his death. Everything was a blur. His family held a funeral Mass for him in Holland, and then, graciously, arranged for his body to be sent home for burial among his Daybreak community in Toronto. I flew up for the day and saw him there for the last time in his open casket—a plain pine box, decorated colorfully by the L'Arche residents.

I felt numb—unable to express any thoughts or feelings. But when I returned to work the next day there was a letter waiting for me in the morning mail, an envelope addressed in Henri's unmistakable hand. It was a letter he had written some weeks before: "Boy, oh, boy!" he said. "What a beautiful plaque! I don't know if I have any place worthy to hang it." He acknowledged his own gratefulness for our friendship and said how much he looked forward to all we would do together in the future.

It was the first sign that my relationship with Henri was not over. With the help of Sue Mosteller, Henri's literary executrix, we completed *Adam*. In a remarkable way, it was indeed an expression of Henri's "creed"—a culmination of all that he had learned in his years at L'Arche, and of the long journey that had ended there.

In concluding the book, Henri had written of Adam:

Is this when his resurrection began, in the midst of my grief? That is what happened to the mourning Mary of Magdala when she heard a familiar voice calling her by her name. That is what happened for the downcast disciples on the road to Emmaus when a stranger talked to them and their hearts burned within them. ... Mourning turns to dancing, grief turns to joy, despair turns to hope, and fear turns to love. Then hesitantly someone is saying, "He is risen, he is risen indeed."<sup>20</sup>

Over the years that I knew Henri, there were long stretches when I would have hesitated to include him in a calendar of saints. I had seen too much of the wounds—and not enough of the healer. But by the time he died it was easy for me to imagine him in that cloud of witnesses—not because he performed miracles or achieved some extra-human status, but because his life was so clearly a story marked by grace, conversion, and steady growth in the spiritual life. Through the broken pieces of his own complex humanity he managed to reveal an aspect of the divine image.

It is, once again, doubtful that he would be canonized. And yet he stands for me as a kind of paradigmatic saint—at least the type that interests me. He didn't entice me to want to be like him, but he made me more conscious of what it means to be God's beloved, and to see my own life in relation to the story of Jesus, another gospel in the making.

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Looking back over my life it is possible to construe a narrative arc, in which Merton and Nouwen played central roles, leading from my early youth right up to the present moment. But at any particular moment it didn't necessarily seem that way. I did not realize when I first read Merton or met Dorothy Day or Henri Nouwen, "Ok, this is going to be the fundamental encounter of your life."

We go one step at a time, and occasionally those steps involve some dramatic gestures, such as when St. Francis kissed a leper. But as Dorothy Day said, "I have kissed a leper not once, but probably several times and I can't say I am any the better for it."<sup>21</sup>

One of my favorite religious films is, of all things, a Disney movie called "The Other Side of Heaven," about a young Mormon missionary in the South Pacific. After many trials and adventures he writes to his fiancée back home and sums up the lessons he has learned: "There is a thread that connects heaven and earth," he says. "If we find that thread everything is meaningful, even death. If we don't find it, nothing is meaningful, even life."

Sometimes I feel I have found that thread, only to lose it the very next moment in some fit of impatience or pique, whether at work or at home. It is a thread that runs through the lives of Thomas Merton and Henri Nouwen, as it does in each of our lives, whether we acknowledge that or not. It is a voice that calls us to be braver, more loving, more truthful, more holy. To the extent that we respond to that call, our lives become a parchment; our sufferings and our actions are the ink. The workings of the Holy Spirit are the pen, and with it God writes a living gospel.

## Notes

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1. Jean-Pierre de Caussade, *Abandonment to Divine Providence* (New York: Image, 1975), p. 45.

2. *All Saints: Daily Reflections on Saints, Prophets, and Witnesses for our Time* (New York: Crossroad, 1997).

3. Thomas Merton, *The Seven Storey Mountain* (Garden City: NY: Doubleday/Image, 1970), p. 203.

4. Merton, *Seven Storey Mountain*, p. 382.

5. Merton, *Seven Storey Mountain*, p. 393.

6. Thomas Merton, *The Sign of Jonas* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday/Image, 1956), p. 318.

7. Thomas Merton, *Conjectures of a Guilty Bystander* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday/Image, 1968), p. 156.
8. Merton, *Conjectures*, pp. 157-58.
9. Thomas Merton, *The Asian Journal* (New York: New Directions, 1973), p. 233, p. 235.
10. Merton, *Seven Storey Mountain*, pp. 510-12. Italics in original.
11. Henri Nouwen, *The Inner Voice of Love* (New York: Doubleday, 1996), p. xiii.
12. Nouwen, *The Inner Voice*, p. 118.
13. Nouwen, *The Inner Voice*, p. 118.
14. Henri Nouwen, *Sabbatical Journey* (New York: Crossroad, 1998), p. 61.
15. Henri Nouwen, *Adam: God's Beloved* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1997), pp. 36-37.
16. Nouwen, *Adam*, p. 37.
17. Nouwen, *Adam*, p. 102.
18. Henri Nouwen, *The Inner Voice of Love* (New York: Doubleday, 1996), p. 118.
19. Nouwen, *Adam*, p. 127.
20. Nouwen, *Adam*, p. 120.
21. Dorothy Day, *Selected Writings* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books: 1992), p. 110.