Desert Magnificat of La Soledad*

By Annice Callahan, RSCJ

a pillar of cloud by day, a pillar of fire by night
water from the rock, manna is your name

the desert sun burns relentlessly at noon
the cactus flower blooms in its light

sand traces mark the mountain path
footprints mirror the heart’s journey

the sunset’s afterglow palettes the sky
fire wears many colors

snakes and coyotes lurk in the brush
shimmers of wind stir the wildflowers

the desert moon is a compass in the dark night
the owl in the palm tree watches for its prey

rose in the east heralds the dawn
the dew: we can obey our thirst

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*In 1940, Thomas Merton went to Cuba to make a pilgrimage to Our Lady of Cobre. On the way there he found in Camagüey a church dedicated to La Soledad, Our Lady of Solitude: “a little dressed-up image up in a shadowy niche: you could hardly see her. La Soledad! One of my big devotions, and you never find her, never hear anything about her in this country, except that one of the old California missions was dedicated to her” (The Seven Storey Mountain 281).