

"A Humanly Impoverished Thirst for Light": Thomas Merton's Receptivity To the Feminine, to Judaism, and to Religious Pluralism¹

Edward K. Kaplan

What divides us? What unites us? We disagree in law and creed, in commitments which lie at the very heart of our religious existence. We say no to one another in some doctrines essential and sacred to us. What unites us? Our being accountable to God, our being objects of God's concern, precious in His eyes.

Abraham Joshua Heschel, 1965²

The voyage of Thomas Merton, as of that of the Roman Catholic Church, from triumphalism, supersessionism or "replacement theology" to an acceptance of Judaism as spiritually autonomous, beloved by God, was long and very difficult. For the Church, it took about two thousand years; for Merton it began around twenty years after he became a Catholic. The background for this paper is provided by *Merton and Judaism*, a volume in the series on Merton and world religious traditions published by Fons Vitae.³ The book's two subtitles guide these reflections: first, "Holiness in Words," a phrase from Abraham Joshua Heschel referring to God's presence in the Hebrew Bible; second, "Recognition, Repentance, and Renewal," recognition of past faults, repentance for them, and renewal of Jewish and Christian life both separately and in partnership. We all need renewal.

Recognition and Repentance

Thomas Merton became a partner with Judaism, "the first covenant," as the "old covenant" is now more generously named by Christians, amidst the Second Vatican Council's internal conflicts about the declaration on the Jews. During the turbulent month of September 1964, Merton received a jolt from Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel, professor of Jewish ethics and mysticism at the Jewish

Theological Seminary in New York, and author of books on prayer, religious philosophy, and the Hebrew prophets, which Merton taught to the novices at Gethsemani.⁴ Heschel sent Merton his recent memorandum (dated 3 September 1964) objecting to the compromised text stalled by the Council Fathers amidst great controversy. The original draft, prepared by the saintly Augustin Cardinal Bea and his Secretariat for Christian Unity, was attacked by members of the Curia for being too favorable to Judaism.⁵

Heschel shared with Merton his outrage that the modern, post-Holocaust Church might still consider Jews to be unfulfilled Christians. I quote a crucial passage from Heschel's rejection of mission to the Jews:

Since this present draft document calls for "reciprocal understanding and appreciation, to be attained by theological study and fraternal discussion" between Jews and Catholics, it must be stated that *spiritual fratricide* is hardly a means for the attainment of "fraternal discussion" or "reciprocal understanding." A message that regards the Jew as a candidate for conversion and proclaims that the destiny of Judaism is to disappear will be abhorred by the Jews all over the world and is bound to foster reciprocal distrust as well as bitterness and resentment. . . . As I have said repeatedly to leading personalities of the Vatican, I am ready to go to Auschwitz any time, if faced with the alternative of conversion or death.⁶

Merton answered Heschel immediately, on 9 September, for once, almost speechless: "It is simply incredible. I don't know what to say about it. This much I will say: my latent ambitions to be a true Jew under my Catholic skin will surely be realized if I continue to go through experiences like this, being spiritually slapped in the face by these blind and complacent people of whom I am nevertheless a 'collaborator.'"

The following day (10 September) Merton took sides with Heschel in his private journal, as he began to elaborate a theological position with regard to Judaism as a living tradition:

Abraham Heschel sent a memo on the new Jewish chapter. It is incredibly bad. All the sense has been taken out of it, all the originality, all the light, and it has become a stuffy and point-

less piece of formalism, with the *incredibly* stupid addition that the Church is looking forward with hope to the union of the Jews with herself. As a humble theological and eschatological desire, yes, maybe; but that was not what was meant. It is this lack of spiritual and eschatological sense, this unawareness of the real need for *profound* change that makes such statements pitiable. Total lack of prophetic insight and even of elementary compunction.

It is precisely in prophetic and therefore deeply humiliated and humanly impoverished thirst for light that Christians and Jews can begin to find a kind of unity in seeking God's will together. For Rome simply to declare itself, as she now is, the mouthpiece of God and perfect interpreter of His [God's] will for Jews (with the implication that He in no way speaks to them directly) is simply monstrous.⁷

"Where is the prophetic and therefore deeply humiliated and humanly impoverished thirst for light, that Christians and Jews may now begin to find some kind of unity in seeking God's will together? But if Rome simply declares herself complacently to be the mouthpiece of God and perfect interpreter of God's will for the Jews, with the implication that He in no way ever speaks to them directly, this is simply monstrous!"

Merton dramatically *recognized* a sinful condition within the institutional Church, the absence of even "elementary compunction," and he sought its *repentance* (the "deeply humiliated thirst" of inner transformation) in order to remedy the Church's spiritual blindness. His righteous anger was more than just generous; he himself experienced the pain of Jews persecuted for centuries by the Christian majority. Merton was fully aware of the Roman Catholic Church's millennial "teaching of contempt," propagated at the popular level by pastoral teachings and the old liturgy.⁸

Here I emphasize the positive, however, by exploring Merton's "latent ambition to be a true Jew under his Catholic skin," as he stated to Rabbi Heschel. Merton was already on the road, having been "spiritually slapped in the face." He took courage in his "thirst for light," or more precisely, a "prophetic and therefore deeply humiliated and humanly impoverished thirst for light." Such humility would favor a partnership so "that Christians and Jews can begin to find some kind of unity in seeking God's will together."

Pluralism and Dialogue

Thomas Merton thus asserted the basic premise of authentic inter-faith dialogue: that the will of God is not completely known, nor exclusive to one tradition. Some vision of religious pluralism must attenuate the claim that one's own revelation is absolutely true. The pluralist trusts that if God is God, God is the God of all peoples. Our particular revelations are alive, ongoing, unceasingly calling for response and interpretation. Merton remained committed to his Catholic self while expanding his contemplative awareness, as he sought relentlessly to clarify God's will.

Abraham Joshua Heschel arrived at his pluralistic perspective while retaining his absolute commitment to the Sinai covenant and to the Jewish people. In November 1965 he summarized his view of interfaith cooperation in his inaugural lecture, "No Religion Is An Island," as Harry Emerson Fosdick Visiting Professor at Union Theological Seminary, the liberal Protestant institution.⁹ Heschel's impressive opening words define himself, and the Jewish people, in continuity with Biblical tradition:

I speak as a member of a congregation whose founder was Abraham, and the name of my rabbi is Moses.

I speak as a person who was able to leave Warsaw, the city in which I was born, just six weeks before the disaster began. My destination was New York, it would have been Auschwitz or Treblinka. I am a brand plucked from the fire, in which my people was burned to death. I am a brand plucked from the fire of an altar of Satan on which millions of human lives were exterminated to evil's greater glory, and on which so much else was consumed: the divine image of so many human beings, many people's faith in the God of justice and compassion, and much of the secret and power of attachment to the Bible bred and cherished in the hearts of men for nearly two thousand years.

The *Shoah* gave special urgency to Heschel's celebration of God's presence in the Hebrew Bible. Christians and Jews share his loyalty to that text, with our different understandings of its authority. Our common ancestors, Abraham and Moses, heeded God's call and fathered the ancient Israelites, community of the "first covenant."

Two decades after the allied victory in Europe, Heschel, as “a brand plucked from the fire,” echoed the prophet Zechariah (3:2) to assert the sanctity of all humankind. He considered the spiritual consequences of Hitler’s intended genocide to be universal, including but surpassing the question of Jewish survival. The death and torture—physical and psychological—of millions of Jews and non-Jews points to a peril from which we continue, increasingly, to suffer: namely, our diminished image of ourselves as living symbols of God.¹⁰ The degradation of what it means to be human is the most insidious danger of our age.

The interfaith environment supported Heschel’s proclamation of his Jewish responsibility. Later in his inaugural lecture Heschel summarized his view of interfaith dialogue in a way that reverberates with Merton’s defense of Judaism during the Second Vatican Council; this is Heschel:

I suggest that the most significant basis for meeting of men of different religious traditions is the level of fear and trembling, of humility and contrition, where our individual moments of faith are mere waves in the endless ocean of mankind’s reaching out for God, where all formulations and articulations appear as understatements, where our souls are swept away by the awareness of the urgency of answering God’s commandment, while stripped of pretension and conceit we sense the tragic insufficiency of human faith.

What divides us? What unites us? We disagree in law and creed, in commitments which lie at the very heart of our religious existence. . . . What unites us? Our being accountable to God, our being objects of God’s concern, precious in His eyes.¹¹

Heschel and Merton share the same acute sense of spiritual embarrassment—“humility and contrition”—before God, as they acknowledge “the tragic insufficiency of human faith.” Merton calls it a “prophetic and therefore deeply humiliated and humanly impoverished thirst for light that [will allow] Christians and Jews [to] begin to find some kind of unity in seeking God’s will together.” Such are the elementary pre-conditions, both inward and theological, for a roadmap to peace.

Heschel’s task, and that of the post-Holocaust generation, was and remains to revive “the divine image of so many human beings, many people’s faith in the God of justice and compassion, and much of the secret and power of attachment to the Bible.” The

Jewish people are witnesses, representing by their very existence as Jews loyalty to the living God: "The Bible is holiness in words. . . . It is as if God took these Hebrew words and breathed into them of His power, and the words became a live wire charged with His spirit. To this very day they are hyphens between heaven and earth."¹²

The Feminine Unconscious

Thomas Merton's private journals, now published, trace an intriguing connection between his progressive receptivity to Judaism and his late opening to femininity. A cluster of highly charged symbols emerges in Merton's dream life and artistic works around the years of Vatican *aggiornamento* (updating or renewal). In a previous paper I examined the influence of Merton's series of dreams of "Proverb," a young Jewish woman, as they affected his appreciation of Judaism and the world at large.¹³ That process of reintegrating *Eros* into his self-conception culminated in the epiphany of Fourth and Walnut, at least at the literary and ideological level of his public persona.

My hypothesis is that Merton's fantasized love for "Proverb," and his celebration of the divine feminine in his prose poem "Hagia Sophia," and, of course, his veneration of the Virgin Mary, are essentially connected with his "latent ambition to be a true Jew under [his] Catholic skin." Merton's new sensitivity to Judaism was part of his evolving pluralism, his ability, and indeed his passion, to participate in the spiritual life of other traditions, Western and Asian.

This line of thought, a focus on the feminine and on *Eros*, of which my reflections are a part, is familiar to the Merton scholarly community. Among the documents are: Merton's talks to the Contemplative Sisters, *The Springs of Contemplation*¹⁴; *The Merton Annual* (vol. 13), George Kilcourse's introduction, "Spirituality as the Freedom to Channel *Eros*"; interview with Jane Marie Richardson, SL; in *The Merton Annual* (vol. 14), Victor A. Kramer's introduction, "Merton's Openness to Change and his Foreshadowing of a Feminist Spirituality"; the interview with Myriam Dardenne, "A Journey into Wholeness"; and Jonathan Montaldo's "Gallery of Women's Faces and Dreams of Women from the Drawings and Journals of Thomas Merton"; studies of Merton's love poems to "M"¹⁵; the late Myriam Dardenne's presentation of Merton and

the feminine at the ITMS meeting held at Bellarmine University in Louisville KY in 2001; *Learning to Love, The Journal of Thomas Merton, vol. 6, 1966-1967*¹⁶; and much more.

Two recent articles by Judaic scholars suggest that Merton's liberation of *Eros* finds deep historical roots in Jewish mysticism. Arthur Green and Peter Shäfer advance the same bold hypothesis that, in Green's terms, "the unequivocal feminization of the *shekhinah* in the Kabbalah of the thirteenth century is a Jewish response to and adaptation of the revival of devotion to Mary in the twelfth-century Western church."¹⁷ We thus confirm that Thomas Merton's dreams of Proverb, the young Jewish woman, have a significant historical correlative, objective in its existence though intimately personal, subjective in its function.

Merton's feminine imagery parallels the development within ancient and rabbinic Judaism, culminating in the thirteenth-century Kabbalah, of a feminization of God as represented by the *shekhinah*. Put briefly, the Kabbalistic notion of *shekhinah* is the ultimate mediator: she is the indwelling Presence of God in the world, the feminine element within the Godhead, and the *kenesset yisra'el*, the hypostatized Community of Israel, i.e. the Jewish people (not "the Synagogue," a term foreign to Judaism). For example, one of the earliest manifestations of a female consort of God is the figure of Wisdom, *hokhmah*, of Proverbs 8, "identified with the Torah throughout rabbinic literature."¹⁸ There are other womanly entities in Jewish tradition, Mother Rachel, Mother Zion, the Temple, the Holy Ark, the Tent of Meeting, etc., and especially the Sabbath Queen or Bride.

Thomas Merton associates within his inner life a similar cluster of female figures, the most prominent of which are the Blessed Virgin Mary, her mother Saint Anne (in Hebrew, Hannah), Hagia Sophia, Proverb, and M, the real woman with whom Merton the monk fell passionately in love. Green's study provides a precise clue as to why Proverb is embodied, for Merton, as a young Jewish woman, and why that dream accompanied his opening to Judaism and to the world. The Jewish or Biblical foundation of Merton's fantasies may very well be the Song of Songs, "the tradition's prime source for all discussion of sacred *Eros*."¹⁹

Merton's powerful prose poem, "Hagia Sophia," has been carefully interpreted as a plateau in his relationship to the feminine, a summary of mostly unconscious aspirations for a tender Mother and a fearful yearning to be loved by a real woman, such as he

was several years later by M, the student nurse.²⁰ Merton struggled to reconcile his warring impulses as a man and as a celibate monk: to be loved by his mother, to love his mother, to accept his erotic desire for a woman, body and soul, and in the end to integrate all this with his devotion to God, to Christ, and to the Blessed Virgin. (Not to mention his vow of obedience!) Theologically speaking, Merton's "Hagia Sophia" synthesizes many influences, his dreams (as recounted in the journal), Meister Eckhart, Julian of Norwich, especially mystics of the Eastern Church, and the Song of Songs.

To focus our present reflections on Merton's receptivity to the Other through the feminine, I quote only the two first stanzas, corresponding to the awakening, Dawn, The Hour of Lauds:

There is in all visible things an invisible fecundity, a dimmed light, a meek namelessness, a hidden wholeness. This mysterious Unity and Integrity is Wisdom, the Mother of all, *Natura naturans*. There is in all things an inexhaustible sweetness and purity, a silence that is a fount of action and joy. It rises up in wordless gentleness and flows out to me from the unseen roots of all created being, welcoming me tenderly, saluting me with indescribable humility. This is at once my own being, my own nature, and the Gift of my Creator's Thought and Art within me, speaking as Hagia Sophia, speaking as my sister, Wisdom. I am awakened, I am born again at the voice of this my Sister, sent to me from the depths of the divine fecundity.²¹

Wisdom is a nurse who awakens the poet in his hospital bed, the Blessed Virgin, earthly mother, and lover—all these females are condensed and elaborated in Merton's meditation. He is being loved; that self-acceptance as a man and as a monk beloved by God made it possible for him to welcome other religions to the feast. There is also a concerted ethical thrust. According to Susan McCaslin, Merton's placing of "Hagia Sophia" in *Emblems of a Season of Fury*, also "calls for the transformation of the world through non-violence and non-retaliation."²²

Specialists can uncover the deeper stratum of Thomas Merton's progressive receptivity to the feminine by examining the exegetical tradition of the Song of Songs. Green traces popular Christian awareness of the Canticle "in the liturgical settings for the four festivals of Mary found in the old Christian calendar (Nativity,

Purification, Annunciation, and Assumption of the Virgin)[:] verses from the Canticle are often used to depict the love between God, to whom she is both bride and mother, and the Virgin. She is the garden of delight whom God enters and in whom He takes pleasure; she is also the 'sealed fountain' out of whom will flow the living spring of Christ."²³

For Merton, probably the most important Christian interpreter was Bernard of Clairvaux (1090-1153) whose homilies on the Song of Songs are recognized as "one of the most popular texts of Western Christian mysticism of all time."²⁴ It is significant that Merton's close friend, Jean Leclercq, OSB, co-edited the Latin collection of Saint Bernard's sermons and wrote a book entitled *Monks and Love in Twelfth-Century France* (not "Monks in love"!).²⁵ A worthy inter-faith research project would clarify Merton's place within Cistercian spirituality and its erotic dimensions, taking into account Jewish interpretations of the Song of Songs, most of which Thomas Merton probably did not directly know.²⁶ Here is Arthur Green's conclusion:

This rich and varied symbolization of Eros in the Christian texts precedes and provides a context for understanding that which happens a century later in the Jewish mystical sources, especially the Zohar, where images of mother, sister, bride, and a host of others are deeply interlocked. For the Christians this love remains mostly a chaste, maternal Eros, here transformed on the spiritual/hermeneutical plane to that of the virginal, untouched bride. For the Jews, not having a tradition that glorifies virginity or celibacy, the varieties of female imagery in the imagination of the mystic will culminate in the fantasy of a direct sexual coupling. For the Christian sources the love expressed in these readings of the Canticle is that between Christ, who is God, and His human mother Mary, who is not God. For the Kabbalist, whose God is manifest in the ten *sefirot*, *shekhinah* is within the Godhead and the Eros of the Canticle is about the love of God for God. This love is strengthened and supported by human effort, indeed allows itself to be dependent on the energies aroused by Israel in this world, but essentially remains transcendent. Despite these real differences, however, the commonality of symbols, typologies, and structures of thought is truly remarkable.²⁷

Merton's life and writings also reflect the quest literature of the twelfth century, a longing for God, for human and spiritual love, and for a pious life. Jews and Muslims in Golden Age Spain shared in this Christian revival of spiritual Eros. Among the Jewish examples cited by Arthur Green are Bahya Ibn Paquda, *The Duties of the Heart*, "Maimonides' description of the love of God [*Mishneh Torah, hilkhot teshuvah*, 10:3; also *Guide of the Perplexed*, 3:51] in which the Song of Songs plays a key role"; the Sufi quest for union with God that influenced his son, Abraham Maimonides; poetry written in Arabic or Hebrew by Jews that was both religious and erotic, and more.

In addition, the studies by Green and Shäfer in themselves contribute significantly to interfaith scholarship, not only because of their content; they develop hypotheses usually ignored by Judaic scholars, a direct and profound influence of Christian practice on Jewish theology and inner experience of God. Accordingly, scholars of Christianity (and Islam) might examine with more objectivity the influence of Jewish traditions.

Pluralistic Theology

This is a time for generosity and hope, but also for sober realism. Neither Merton nor Heschel quickly jumped on the bandwagon of pluralism, pro-actively affirming the preciousness of all religions. But they did so when called upon, and with utmost respect and conviction: Heschel in his inaugural address at Union Theological Seminary, Merton in *Conjectures of a Guilty Bystander* (1966), and especially in Merton's final writings on Asian spirituality. Both men recognized the sanctity of other religions, preparing future cooperation and mutual support against the demons of nihilism, dehumanization, and doubt, our inescapable heritage as fallible human beings.

Mutual respect and "reciprocal understanding and appreciation" first require loyalty to one's own tradition. Neither Merton nor Heschel deviated from or even compromised their sectarian commitments. It is true that many people feared that Merton would leave the Church, but there is no hard evidence that he would have done so. In fact, the conference in Asia during which he met his death was devoted to Christian monastic renewal through dialogue with other traditions, including Marxism. We must not forget that Merton's stated desire to be a Jew, or a Buddhist or a Hindu, etc.,

"under his Catholic skin," retains that skin which, after all, held him physically and spiritually together, and defined who he was in the world.

Both Merton and Heschel revered Judaism—ancient and contemporary—as a repository of the Holy Spirit, invigorated by a supernatural Presence both beyond and within our texts, systems, beliefs, and practices. Merton would agree with Heschel that "[t]he essence of Jewish religious thinking does not lie in entertaining a concept of God [my emphasis, EK] but in the ability to articulate a memory of moments of illumination by His presence."²⁸ This is the pluralistic or contemplative approach to religious commitment.

Heschel's loyalty unto death to the Jewish covenant also grounds a pluralistic model. His affirmation of the Mount Sinai event was absolute, although he carefully and deliberately, in *God in Search of Man* (1955), insisted that the original Revelation was witnessed by all mankind. Heschel first asserts, with normative Judaism, that all Jews at all times can bear witness to the original event: "There is no one who has no faith. Every one of us stood at the foot of Sinai and beheld the voice that proclaimed, *I am the Lord thy God*. Every one of us participated in saying, *We shall do and we shall hear*. However, it is the evil in man and the evil in society silencing the depth of the soul that block and hamper our faith."²⁹ At the very least, his understanding of divine revelation is pluralistic with regard to competing denominations within contemporary Judaism.

Most significantly, Heschel's perspective is both "orthodox" and universal. When he says that "every one of us stood at the foot of Sinai and beheld the voice that proclaimed, *I am the Lord thy God*" he also and especially means Jew and Gentile. Heschel goes on to cite a rabbinical interpretation of the Biblical text, a Midrash that validates this universality: "*Tanhuma, Yitro*, I. The words, according to the Rabbis, were not heard by Israel alone, but by the inhabitants of all the earth. The divine voice divided itself into 'the seventy tongues' of man, so that all might understand it. *Exodus Rabba*, 5,9."³⁰

Abraham Joshua Heschel is Thomas Merton's partner because they both straddle the fence between Orthodoxy and Liberalism as they call to the Holy Spirit within all people. Heschel assumes that sensitivity to holiness—a gift emanating from the Divine—is intrinsic to everyone: "Recondite is the dimension where God and man meet, and yet not entirely impenetrable. [God] placed within

man something of His spirit (see *Isaiah 63:10*), and 'it is the spirit in a man, the breath of the Almighty, that makes him understand' (*Job 32:8*)."³¹

Merton and Heschel invite us all to partake in the Holy Spirit. If the beginning of the Jewish people is God's covenant with Abraham, the foundation of Jewish-Christian dialogue is the Sinai Revelation as we agree to interpret it. These two stories are models of our unfinished business. We cannot forget that Abraham was the father of both Isaac and Ishmael; Jews and Muslims must face and resolve the real conflicts of Sarah and Hagar. Heschel's conviction that God's self-revelation at Sinai was given to all humankind, in its "seventy tongues," reminds us that the Hebrew Bible is a human "report," a midrash, of the Divine message.³²

Thomas Merton recognized that no human authority, no Church, not even his own, can speak exclusively for God. How many of humankind's "seventy tongues" does the Roman Catholic Church possess? Or any person or institution? Merton's journal entry of 10 September 1964 makes it clear: "It is precisely in prophetic and therefore deeply humiliated and humanly impoverished thirst for light that Christians and Jews can begin to find a kind of unity in seeking God's will together. For Rome simply to declare itself, as she now is, the mouthpiece of God and perfect interpreter of [God's] will for Jews (with the implication that He in no way speaks to them directly) is simply monstrous."³³

Merton's valiant, lifelong struggle with the feminine within him, his increased support of initiatives by women in religious life, accompanied his affirmation of other traditions, including Judaism. Thomas Merton and Abraham Heschel incite us to renew the Holy Spirit, the Presence of God, in our hearts and in our communities. All of us, Jews, Christians, Muslims, and others, must recover the Spirit of Vatican II, the Holy Spirit (in Hebrew, *ruah hakodesh*) beyond all beliefs, as we nurture, through our irreducible particularity, our reverence for what is universally sacred.

Notes

1. This paper was presented at the ITMS Eighth General Meeting in Vancouver, B.C. June 2003.

2. Abraham Heschel, "No Religion Is An Island," delivered on 10 November 1965 at the Union Theological Seminary; originally pub. *Union Seminary Quarterly* 21:2 (January 1966): 117-34. Reprinted in Susannah

Heschel, ed., Abraham Heschel, *Moral Grandeur and Spiritual Audacity* (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1996); hereafter abbreviated as *Moral Grandeur*.

3. Beatrice Bruteau ed., *Merton and Judaism. Holiness in Words. Recognition, Repentance, and Renewal* (Louisville KY: Fons Vitae, 2003); hereafter abbreviated as *Merton and Judaism*.

4. For comparative studies of Merton and Heschel see Edward K. Kaplan, "Contemplative Inwardness and Prophetic Action: Thomas Merton's Dialogue with Abraham J. Heschel," Shaul Magid, "Abraham Joshua Heschel and Thomas Merton: Heretics of Modernity," "Merton-Heschel Correspondence," all in *Merton and Judaism*, pp. 217-268. For foundational works on Heschel see John C. Merkle, *The Genesis of Faith. The Depth Theology of Abraham Joshua Heschel* (New York: Macmillan, 1985) and Edward K. Kaplan, *Holiness in Words. Abraham Joshua Heschel's Poetics of Piety* (Albany NY: SUNY Press, 1996). The Merton-Heschel correspondence with supporting documents quoted below is from *Merton and Judaism*, pp. 217-31.

5. See Brenda Fitch Fairaday, "Thomas Merton's Prophetic Voice: Merton, Heschel, and Vatican II," and Appendix A, "The Successive Versions of *Nostra Aetate*, Translation, Outline, Chronology, Commentary," by James M. Somerville, *Merton and Judaism*, pp. 269-82, 341-72.

6. This and the next quotation from *Merton and Judaism*, pp. 223-25.

7. Thomas Merton, *Dancing in the Waters of Life. The Journals of Thomas Merton* (Journals 5, 1963-1965, ed. Robert E. Dargy; HarperSanFrancisco, 1987), pp. 142-43. Compare with the edited version prepared for publication, quoted by Ron Miller, from *A Vow of Conversation* (p.76), in "Merton: Pioneer of Pluralism," *Merton and Judaism*, p. 293.

8. See the article by Fairaday cited above in note 5 and especially Ron Miller, "Merton: Pioneer of Pluralism," *Merton and Judaism*, pp. 283-96.

9. The next quotation is from Heschel, "No Religion Is An Island," *Moral Grandeur*, p. 235. See Harold Kasimow and Byron Sherwin, eds., *No Religion Is An Island. Abraham Joshua Heschel and Interreligious Dialogue* (New York: Orbis Books, 1991.)

10. Abraham Heschel, *Man's Quest for God* (New York: Charles Scribners Sons, 1955), chap. 5, "Symbolism," pp. 115-44; "Sacred Image of Man," in *The Insecurity of Freedom* (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1966), pp. 150-67. For a summary of what I call Heschel's sacred humanism, see A.J. Heschel, *Who Is Man?* (Stanford University Press, 1965). These resources provide a starting point for theological reflection on incarnation in Judaism and Christianity.

11. Abraham Heschel, "No Religion Is An Island," *Moral Grandeur*, pp. 239-40; see also Heschel, "The Ecumenical Movement" (during Cardinal Bea's visit to the United States in 1963), in *Insecurity of Freedom*, pp. 179-83.
12. Heschel, *God in Search of Man. A Philosophy of Judaism* (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1955), p. 244.
13. Edward K. Kaplan, "'Under my Catholic Skin,' Thomas Merton's Opening to Judaism and to the World," in *Merton and Judaism*, pp. 109-25.
14. Thomas Merton *The Springs of Contemplation. A Retreat at the Abbey of Gethsemani* (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1992; repr. Notre Dame IND: Ave Maria Press, 1997).
15. Kilcourse, *The Merton Annual* 13 (2000), pp. 7-13; Richardson, *ibid.*, pp. 127-43; Kramer, *The Merton Annual* 14 (2001), pp. 7-11; Dardenne, *ibid.*, pp. 33-55; *ibid.*, pp. 155-72. See also Douglas Burton-Christie, "Rediscovering Love's World: Thomas Merton's Love Poems and the Language of Ecstasy," *Cross Currents* (Spring 1989), pp. 64-82; Andrea C. Cook, "The Experience of Romantic Transcendence in Thomas Merton's *Eighteen Poems*," *The Merton Annual* 14 (2001), pp. 121-54; Cynthia Bourgeault, "Merton in Love," *The Merton Seasonal* 27, 2 (Summer 2002), pp. 20-25.
16. *Learning to Love, The Journal of Thomas Merton, vol. 6, 1966-1967*, ed. Christine M. Bochen (HarperSanFrancisco, 1997).
17. Arthur Green, "Shekhinah, the Virgin Mary, and the Song of Songs," *American Jewish Studies (AJS) Review* 26:1 (2002), pp. 1-52; hereafter abbreviated as Green; Peter Shäfer, "Daughter, Sister, Bride, and Mother: Images of the Femininity of God in the Early Kabbalah," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 68:2 (June 2000), pp. 221-42. orig. pub. in German, 1998; see Green, p. 21, n88.
18. Green, p. 20, and n83. "The interplay of traditions is manifest in Philo, who depicts the 'Wisdom' of Prov. 8:22 as copulating with the Father and giving birth to the visible universe."
19. Green, p. 1.
20. See Michael Mott, *The Seven Mountains of Thomas Merton* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1984), pp. 307-08, 312-13, 361-64 on the prose poem; Therese Lentfohr, *Words and Silence: On the Poetry of Thomas Merton* (New York: New Directions, 1979); and Susan McCaslin, "Merton and 'Hagia Sophia' (Holy Wisdom)," *Merton and Hesychasm: The Prayer of the Heart*, ed. Jonathan Montaldo and Bernadette Dieker (Louisville KY: Fons Vitae, 2003), pp. 235-54. See Robert Jingen Gunn, *Journeys into Emptiness. Dogen, Merton, Jung and the Quest for Transformation* (New York: Paulist Press, 2000) for a good survey of Merton's relationships with women, starting with his mother.

21. Merton, *Emblems of a Season of Fury* (New York: New Directions, 1963), 61-69; originally published in a limited edition in January 1962 on Victor Hammer's handpress, Stamperia del Santuccio, then in the magazine Ramparts, March 1963. See *The Collected Poems of Thomas Merton* (New York: New Directions, 1977), 363-71.

22. Susan McCaslin, *Merton and Hesychasm*, p. 252.

23. This and the following quotation from Green, pp. 5-6: "The varied interpretations of the Song of Songs present in the early Church attest to a special fascination with this book and its message. For Origen, God's great gift to us in Creation is *eros*, the power of love that also fuels the journey back to God. For the mature Christian, one who has overcome earthly passions for the sake of still more passionate inner journey, the Song of Songs contains the most important message of the Bible. Of course this is precisely a Christian outgrowth and a Platonic reading of Rabbi Akiva's original claim that the Song of Songs is the 'Holy of Holies.' The *Eros* that is essential to Neo-Platonic religion finds its Biblical home in this Christianized reading of the Song of Songs."

24. Green, p. 13. See also "When we look at the unabashed eroticism of Bernard's Homilies on the Song of Songs, or that of his Cistercian followers, we wonder where their parallel is in the Hebrew literature, or wonder at the reason for its absence," Green, p. 23. Green refers to E. Anne Matter, *The Voice of My Beloved: The Songs of Songs in Western Medieval Christianity* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1990) among several other scholarly studies.

25. See *Survival or Prophecy? The Letters of Thomas Merton and Jean Leclercq*, ed. Patrick Hart (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 2002).

26. Green, p. 13, n56-57, see esp. Jean Leclercq, *Monks and Love in Twelfth-Century France* (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1979), and Latin text edited by Jean Leclercq et al., *Sancti Bernardi Opera* (Rome: Editiones Cistercienses, 1955-77). Bernard McGinn, *The Presence of God: A History of Western Christian Mysticism*, vol. 2 (New York: Crossroad, 1996), 158-224. Over 900 manuscripts of Bernard's immensely popular work survived.

27. Green, pp. 21-22.

28. Heschel, *God In Search of Man*, pp. 140-41 for this and the next quotation. See Edward Kaplan, *Holiness in Words*, chap. 9, "Metaphor and Miracle: Modern Judaism and the Holy Spirit," 133-45.

29. Heschel, *God In Search of Man*, pp. 140-41.

30. Heschel, *God in Search of Man*, p. 144, 8.

31. *Ibid.*, p. 137.

32. Cf. Heschel, *God in Search of Man*, p. 185: "We must not read chapters in the Bible dealing with the event at Sinai as if they were texts in systematic theology. Its intention is to celebrate the mystery, to introduce us to it rather than to penetrate or explain it. As a report about revelation the Bible itself is a *midrash*." See Laurence Perlman, "'As a Report about Revelation, the Bible Itself is a Midrash,'" *Conservative Judaism* 55,1 (Fall 2002), pp. 30-37.

33. See above note 7.