Wisdom, Sapiential Poetry, and Personalism: Exploring Some of Thomas Merton's Ideas for Values Education

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An understandable reaction to post-modern eclecticism by some traditional institutions and leaders is for them to strongly assert their particular set of values in an over-arching claim above the myriad of other conflicting perspectives. But instead of gaining expected attention, each of their voices becomes just one more vying for a greater "market share" in the growing uncertainty amongst people of what is true, what is the meaning of life (including self-identity), and how best to live. Unintentionally, or perhaps otherwise, these institutions and leaders join the ranks of those global marketing companies who are attempting to sell a lifestyle of meaning and purpose associated with their product. However, meaning and purpose are not values that can be bought. What today's market sells is brand mystique, in the hope of fostering a client's identity through association with a branded product and thus gaining long-term client allegiance. What this article suggests is that teachers should avoid promotional-type "marketing" strategies in the teaching of traditional values but rather attempt to awaken students to a presence of wisdom that is to be found within life and living. The essay will explore this idea in the light of Thomas Merton's ideas on wisdom, sapiential poetry and personalism.

According to Neil Postman, education should provide an alternative view to that which dominates society, so as to provide students with a more balanced outlook on life. This corrective role, Postman argues, needs to be built into a school's curriculum. In the late sixties and early seventies, he saw this role as a subversive one, and argued that students should be allowed to question authority and to approach learning as an act of self-guided exploration. Ten years later, in response to what he saw as largely a commercial, mass-media-driven society he promoted the idea of teaching as a conserving activity, and promoted the skills of critical

analysis so that students could be made aware of manipulative self-interests acting within society.

In his latest book in this progression, *The End of Education* (1995), his most radical, he continues his appraisal of education in a society that he feels has lost its identity and sense of moral direction. This time he makes the point that schools should not attempt to serve the public but rather "create" a public; and that teachers need to make this their foremost responsibility. Postman's own solution for this present predicament is for teachers to start with a vision—a vision of their students entering public life "imbued with confidence, a sense of purpose, [and] a respect for learning, and tolerance." And for this vision to become reality, he argues, two things are necessary: "the existence of shared narratives and the capacity of such narratives to provide an inspired reason for schooling."[1] In his elaboration of this position he places an emphasis on the word "inspired." In his view, schools now need common "gods" more than common goals. Postman then goes on to suggest five such "gods" or overarching narratives that could possibly serve as sources of enduring inspiration for students.

All the narratives have a common underlying theme, which is the idea of unity within diversity. His first narrative is that without sacrificing one's cultural, national or religious identity a person "can be enlarged by adopting the role of Earth's caretaker."[2] This development of an environmental consciousness is something young people and schools have generally embraced. Second is the narrative that says the existential human condition in one of unknowing and in Postman's words "Therein lies the possibility of our redemption: Knowing that we do not know and cannot know the whole truth, we may move towards it inch by inch by discarding what we know to be false."[3] This creates an educational agenda that celebrates mistakes in learning not as failings but as points of clarification and opportunities towards better understanding. Under this narrative, Postman gives a more humble definition of science as "a method for correcting our mistakes" and not, as popularly imagined, "a source of ultimate truth."[4]

Thirdly, there is the narrative that encourages dialogue, debate, and experimentation and stands against hardened dogmatism. In Postman's view, "All points [of view] are admissible. The only thing we have to fear is that someone will insist on putting in an exclamation point [after their point of view] when we are not yet finished [our discussions]."[5] Fourthly, there is the narrative

that says diversity is something to be celebrated as a source of vitality and creativity rather than suppressed in the interests of a contrived notion of shared "cultural literacy." In explaining this case, Postman points out "whenever a language or art form becomes fixed in time and impermeable, drawing only on its own resource, it is punished by entropy. Whenever difference is allowed, the result is growth and strength."[6] Lastly, there is the narrative of the power of language, about which Postman makes the comment, "There is, to be sure, a world of 'not-words'. But, unlike all the other creatures on the planet, we have access to it only through the world of words."[7]

Although much can be found within Thomas Merton's writings that directly addresses all of Postman's proposals, it is the last dimension of the power of language, and specifically poetic language, that I now wish to explore in the light of some of Thomas Merton's ideas. Merton has been described as a "spiritual master," a title he would have felt uncomfortable with, preferring himself to be known in later life simply as a writer.[8] His extensive writings reflect a person who had a profound understanding of the dignity of the human person: a poet, a seer, a questioner, a social critic, a humorist, and one who had the ability to reach into and express with clarity what lies at the heart of Eastern spiritualities and Western theology.

Knowledge, the Way of Knowing, and the Knower

In any learning situation, three dimensions are always present: knowledge, the way of knowing, and the knower. Various approaches to learning put a different emphasis and value on each of these dimensions. The most dominating epistemological framework of the twentieth century and still today is science, whose methodology has been adopted by modern philosophy, the social sciences, and significant areas of educational research. In this approach emphasis and value is placed on objective, quantifiable knowledge and a single way of knowing: essentially the inductive method. In this approach the subjectivity of the knower has no value except in recording results, and even this may be seen as introducing a distorting factor to the validity of empirical evidence. The dominance of scientific epistemology has led to what has been called the "religious-fication" of science,[9] while others have warned of its dangers, that it "edits out spiritual truths in the way X-ray films omit the beauty of faces."[10]

Recently, however, the actual categorization of scientific knowledge as a legitimate form of "knowledge" has come under question by contemporary theorists such as the social constructionist Kenneth Gergen, who writes that

> There is little reason to believe that we literally experience or "see the world" through a system of categories . . . However, we gain substantially if we consider the world-structuring process as linguistic rather than cognitive. It is through an *a priori* commitment to particular forms of language (genres, conventions, speech codes and so on) that we place boundaries around what we take to be "the real." ... In Goodman's terms, it is *description* not *cognition* that constructs the factual world.[11]

From Merton's perspective, so-called scientific knowledge is only "provisional," being that part of our knowing, which is "'clear' and non-hidden" – in other words, descriptive, in the sense as outlined by Gergen.[12] In his writings Merton introduces a far more encompassing epistemology, that of wisdom, which according to him "embraces and includes science ... [for] behind all that is unveiled and 'discovered' [through science], wisdom touches that which is still veiled and covered."[13] The critical point here is that Merton does not contrast scientific knowledge with wisdom, or what he calls sapiential knowledge (for that would be to fall into the scientific, classificatory paradigm), but says it is the hidden aspect of all things beneath their non-hidden or surface "description."[14] He also uses the verb "touches" for wisdom, thus hinting at an approach that is personal and intimate as opposed to the objective, calculating approach of science. This fits in nicely with his use of the term "sapiential," which derives from the Latin *sapere*, meaning "to taste"—sapiential knowledge is thus gained by "tasting," and is accordingly a more experiential kind of knowledge.

Merton calls scientific knowledge "provisional" for it is incomplete, not total. Wisdom is complete knowledge, known and understood in the knower in the form of a cognitive realization through direct apprehension or intuition. This kind of knowledge does not appeal to any external authority or objective standards for its credibility but rather appeals directly to the authenticity of a person's own being. This understanding of sapiential knowledge, I would argue, is what is missing from our present educational agenda and urgently needs to be built into our teaching curricula.

Merton describes his own realization of this type of sapiential knowledge in a poetic manner, which is the only way it can be described (although it is a universally shared experience), as an apprehension, in "all visible things," of an

> invisible fecundity, a dimmed light, a meek namelessness, a hidden wholeness. This mysterious Unity and Integrity is Wisdom, the Mother of all . . . 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 beings . . . [15]

What this description does is to invite readers, through the agency of words, to "taste" this type of communion experience for themselves or to affirm their own experience against it. In this specific sapiential learning instance, the knower is of central importance and needs to cultivate the disposition of wholehearted attentive awareness rather than that of a detached observer as in scientific investigations. The qualities of wisdom, "inexhaustible sweetness" etc., which Merton refers to are also to be found expressed in a multitude of ways in the world's wisdom literature as the underlying truths of existence and are named in general terms as truth, love, purity and beauty. These qualities are not the romantic niceties of life as opposed to all that is harsh such as suffering and violence but represent the verities of existence that can spiritually support and comfort a person in the midst of hardship. The proof of this is in the fact of their cross-cultural acceptance and staying power and universal elevation under the title of wisdom.

They are certainly not doctrines to be learnt, thought constructions, scientific conclusions, nor the product of critical rational thought. Rather they are to be discovered built into the very spiritual fabric of existence itself, as Merton found them. To find ("taste") these qualities is to know sapientially. This knowledge does not build bridges, cure diseases nor give a definitive meaning to life; what it does give, which is essential for living, is nourishment for the soul, spiritual health, or what the poet Edward Hirsh calls "soul culture."[16]

In contrast to Merton's description of wisdom as a real presence to be experienced beneath or beyond the descriptive surface of things is the following statement by the contemporary theologian Don Cupitt, which is representative of a contemporary nominalistic attitude to language. It represents what could be described

as a type of an anti-wisdom manifesto that invites readers only into an interactive world of words that point to nothing beyond themselves:

1. As both philosophy and religion have in the past taught, there is indeed an unseen intelligible world, or spirit world, about us and within us.
2. The invisible world is the world of words and other symbols.
3. The entire supernatural world of religion is a mythical representation of the world of language.
4. Through the practice of its religion, a society represents to itself, and confirms, the varied ways in which language builds its world.[17]

Here we stay firmly lodged on the page where words, now elevated as having a mind of their own, play and perhaps even misbehave without their creator's consent. In this instance words are seen as mere signs with no "invisible fecundity" illuminating them, stripped of any symbolic value and potentially revealing sapiential presence. Ironically this attitude illustrates distrust in language, in the mysterious ability of words to point to something of value beyond themselves and beyond quantitative formulations. From Cupitt's perspective words have been well and truly flung from the gates of paradise into an unconsoling exile of their own and left to amuse themselves as best they can. In Merton's eyes this would be a world devoid of poetry where wisdom is allowed no revealing presence.

Sapiential Poetry

Working out of the Christian tradition and its symbols, although analogous ideas can be found in other spiritual traditions, Merton elaborated on the unique connection of wisdom and poetic language. For Merton, not all poetry had to be connected with wisdom but as George Kilcourse affirms, poetry as an expression of a "paradise consciousness" was central to his understanding of poetic experience.[18] This understanding is illustrated, for instance, in his review of Louis Zukofsky's poetry. Here Merton describes how the reader can be given an intimation of a pristine, archetypal Edenic state, the state of the spiritual origin of all things, through the imaginative language of poetry. In a sense, for Merton,

all created things contain a vestige of this primordial state, which the poet can penetrate and reveal. Merton writes that

> All really valid poetry (poetry that is fully alive and asserts its reality by its power to generate imaginative life) is a kind of recovery of paradise. Not that the poet comes up with a report that he, an unusual man, has found his own way back into Eden: but the living line and the generative association, the new sound, the music, the structure, are somehow grounded in a renewal of vision and hearing so that he who reads and understands recognizes that here is a new start, a new creation. Here the world gets another chance. Here man, here the reader discovers himself getting another start in life, in hope, in imagination, and why? Hard to say, but probably because the language itself is getting another chance, through the innocence, the teaching, the good faith, the honest senses of the workman poet.[19]

What Merton is suggesting is that for "fully alive" or sapiential poetry, of which Zukofsky is an example, "a new creation"—as he calls it—comes into being that radiates the same "wordless gentleness" that flows out from the unseen roots of all created things in nature. Poetry of this kind, in other words, provides a connection to and a communion with life's underlying depth and re-creates it in poetic terms, thus affirming its presence. This unique function of sapiential poetry is of vital importance for it directly contributes towards and maintains the spiritual health of a person – that ineffable quality of being which children generally have in abundance but which tends to become dissipated with adolescence due to lack of proper care and attention. If, however, adolescents are encouraged to cultivate an appreciation of sapiential poetry and come to understand its value as a means to "taste" the unifying wisdom that permeates all things, then they will eventually come to see that they are not just isolated psycho-physical beings left to survive in an alien landscape, but are in a certain sense "connected" with all existence. And, most significantly of all, this type of wisdom-filled poetry has the potential gradually to awaken the latent presence of wisdom that is mysteriously resident deep within themselves. Once this occurs then this experience, in turn, can be expressed poetically and celebrated by others in an act of spiritual community.

While some readers, perhaps those conditioned by scientific empiricism, may view this transformative potential of sapiential poetry with scepticism and see it only as a wishful projection of a closely held belief or desire, it is nonetheless a view that has an ancient heritage. Merton himself saw this potential as holding the key to understanding the enduring power of the psalms.[20] The Polish poet Czeslaw Milosz, with whom Merton exchanged a substantial amount of correspondence, noted that the idea of revering poetry as an expression of wisdom or divinity was found in pre-Homeric Greek culture where it was described in terms of an epiphany, that is, "an unveiling of reality":

> What in Greek was called *epiphaneia* meant the appearance, the arrival of a divinity among mortals or its recognition under a familiar shape of man or woman. Epiphany thus interrupts the everyday flow of time and events and enters as one privileged moment when we intuitively grasp a deeper more essential reality hidden in things or persons.[21]

To understand, experientially, what it means to "intuitively grasp a deeper more essential reality," which I take as being akin to Merton's idea of knowing sapientially, we need to begin with the question: What is the nature of poetic experience?

Poetic Experience

As master of novices at Gethsemani, Merton used Rainer Maria Rilke's poetry in his classes to illustrate what he meant by poetic experience.[22] He supported the view that poetic experience provided a means of nourishing a person's spiritual life and that it was analogous to religious experience – religious experience being the same kind of experience "only deeper." Indeed one of Merton's reasons for presenting poetry in his conferences was to help his students gain a deeper appreciation of religious experience.

One of the poems Merton used in his teaching was Rilke's "The Panther," which was a work that Rilke described as marking a threshold experience in his own understanding of poetry. During his teaching of poetry, Merton stressed to his students that they should firstly "get the image, get the picture," which in his view was sharpened and made all the more vivid in the imagination of the reader by the sound and rhythm of the language. A clear apprehension of the images, he argued, provided the avenue into

the poetic experience of the poem, and to later reflecting clearly upon its possible meaning.

Rilke's poem begins with an image of a panther in a zoo, locked in a cage like a prisoner and pacing about a small circle, which appears to Rilke to be "like a dance of strength about a center / in which a mighty will stands stupefied."[23] The last stanza, which Merton gave most attention to, reads:

> Only sometimes when the pupil's film
> soundlessly opens . . . then one image fills
> and glides through the quiet tension of the limbs
> into the heart and ceases and is still.

The "one image" in this verse is that of Rilke whom the panther momentarily sees standing outside the cage. The movement of Rilke's image going inward and penetrating into the heart of the panther, and making contact there, was for Merton analogous to "how" and "where" a poet made an interior contact with a poetic object. At the same time, implicitly stated in the poem, the image of the panther, likewise, is passing into Rilke's heart and it is this silent and mysterious interpenetrative contact, in Merton's view, that "constitutes the poem": it was this mutual deep "contact," this spiritual encounter that awakens a new creative consciousness, which could be called poetic consciousness. Such a moment of consciousness, for instance, is the essence of the Japanese verse form, the haiku, which was adopted by many Buddhist Zen masters as a vehicle for the transmission of their wisdom teachings in which the quality of an "experience" was the real message, not just words, which were only the vehicle.[24] It can be seen aptly expressed in the following haiku by the Zen poet Basho, which attempts to capture the experience of a moment of heightened awareness, and in so doing "stretches" the reader's consciousness to grasp this same high degree of awareness as that experienced by the poet:

> In the utter silence
> Of a temple
> A cicada's voice alone
> Penetrates the rocks.[25]

According to Merton, the actual writing of a poem like Basho's haiku or Rilke's "The Panther" was through a re-creative perception of the poet's original interpenetrative contact. This re-creative

perception took place within and utilized the powers of the poet's imagination. In this imaginative act the original experience became actualized aesthetically and given concrete form. The word "aesthetic," from the Greek meaning "perception by the senses, especially by feeling," nicely accords with this imaginative act.[26] The power of the imagination by which the poem was written was not, in Merton's view, a play of fantasy in which the mind passively viewed some superficial and self-generating "mental movie," but rather came out of the deep and creative function of the poet's intellect. This was something Merton learned from William Blake.[27] Accordingly, the poem produced, if it was an adequate poem, was not a description of the poetic object, nor a record of the poet's feeling on seeing the poetic object, but rather a type of union of the two. In Merton's words the poem represented a "new being."

In another of Rilke's poems, "The Merry-Go-Round,"[28] Merton further explored these ideas with his students. The poem begins:

> Under the roof and the roof's shadow turns
> this train of painted horses for a while
> in this bright land that lingers
> before it perishes. . . .

The intervening verses poetically capture the movement of the merry-go-round, the various animals on it, and the captivated children happily whirling around. It concludes with the lines:

> And on the horses swiftly going by
> are shining girls who have outgrown this play;
> in the middle of the flight they let their eyes
> glance here and there and near and far away –
>
> and now and then a big white elephant.
>
> And all this hurries towards the end, so fast,
> Whirling futilely, evermore the same.
>
> A flash of red, of green, of gray, goes past,
> and then a little scarce-begun profile.
> And oftentimes a blissful dazzling smile
> vanishes in this blind and breathless game.

Reflecting upon his own poetic experience of this work Merton felt that Rilke had made interpenetrative contact with the tran-

sient yet beautiful "imaginative life of childhood." And in the poem's structure, its music, and particularly its imagery, he felt that Rilke gave beautiful aesthetic form to this contact. At the sapiential level of this poetic experience through the poetic transfiguring of an everyday merry-go-round, Merton suggested that Rilke had imaginatively recreated Eden before the "fall" – "this bright land that lingers," the land of "blind and breathless" play, of child-like innocence and purity. In a sense, Rilke had given Eden a new "face," which could be poetically "touched" and known sapientially by the reader. "There it is, Eden, before your poetic eyes," Merton seemed to be saying to his students, "taste it, experience it, know it!"

None of this makes any sense, however, if the reader cannot imaginatively recreate what the poet had initially experienced. Imaginative connection is a key idea in Merton's understanding of poetry; the reader has to experience what the poet experienced, otherwise the poem does not come alive in the consciousness of the reader. Imaginative connection is the electric charge that jumps across from one consciousness to another. For this to happen words creatively selected and placed on the page to form a poem cannot simply be read but need to be listened to so as to sense their fully revelatory potential and power. Ultimately, in Merton's view, words have been bestowed with the potential to carry the charge of divine utterance:

> Language is not merely the material or the instrument which the poet uses . . . When in the moment of inspiration the poet's creative intelligence is married with the inborn wisdom of human language (the Word of God and Human Nature – Divinity and Sophia) then in the very flow of new and individual intuitions, the poet utters the voice of that wonderful and mysterious world of God-manhood – it is the transfigured, spiritualized, and divinized cosmos that speaks through him, and through him utters its praise of the Creator.[29]

From this passage it is obvious why Merton saw poetry as a means for the cultivation of a person's spiritual life – "that wonderful and mysterious world of God-manhood." In his view, a person's spiritual life grew in direct proportion to that person's openness and the quality of his or her responsiveness to all of creation. And poetry, as he proposed, provided the means, a specific practice, for cultivating a profound depth of responsiveness. This, in short,

was Merton's path for the gaining of wisdom in the midst of life. If a person, however, chose to withdraw from life, under the delusion that this was an efficacious spiritual practice, then in Merton's opinion they would eventually suffer a type of spiritual death, for they would be without access to life-giving wisdom. Spiritual death, it could be argued, may also ensue when the environment in which a person lives has become overly lifeless and artificial. This was another issue that Merton addressed.

Personalism

Before the word *simulacrum* was popularized by the post-modern cultural theorist Jean Baudrillard, Merton recalls his delight in finding it the Latin Vulgate. He writes that the word

> presents itself as a very suggestive one to describe an advertisement, or an over-inflated political presence, or that face on the TV screen. The word shimmers, grins, cajoles. It is a fine word for something monumentally phony. It occurs for instance in the last line of the First Epistle of John. But there it is usually translated as "idols" . . . "Little Children, watch out for the simulacra!" –watch out for the national, the regional, the institutional images!
>
> Does it occur to us that if, in fact, we live in a society which is par excellence that of the *simulacrum*, we are the champion idolaters of all history?[30]

The world of *simulacra* creates a world of simulation, what Baudrillard calls *hyperreality* and Merton, the world of idols. It is a world without any origin in or connection to reality, and therefore without access to wisdom. And without access to wisdom, as mentioned previously, spiritual "starvation" soon follows. It is a world that is not formed from a creative act but is indefinitely reproducible from "miniaturized units, from matrices, memory banks and command models."[31] It is a world signified by brand names, in which brand mystique, brand identity, brand placement, and building a brand-loyalty base amongst clients constitutes its existence.

It is a world in which the Ford car company, for instance, can buy Jaguar and pay a staggering 84% of its buying price just for the Jaguar name; it is a world in which, as one commentator observed, "Put Nike in a school playground to help tackle bullying and you begin to reach the most street-hardened kids"; it is a world in which "brands generate more [so-called] trust than any institu-

tion – government, church, [or] political [parties]"; it is a world in which "consumers want [to find] readily accessible packaged meanings" – as one brand consultant remarked, "Someone else has thought through the difficult issues, and they [the consumers] can then align themselves with that."[32] For Merton what most characterized this "phony" world was its dangerous and rampant misuse of language. As Thomas Del Prete states:

> Whether in the realms of advertising, politics, art, religion, love, or most destructively, war, the nature and use of language could mean the difference between openness, dialogue, and . . . tautology, control, and manipulation. Language which no longer conveys, or no longer is intended to convey, any semblance of truth or reality is, in Merton's eyes, "denatured," neither a means of authentic personal communication, nor a signification for or evocation of reality.[33]

Merton warned that the world of simulacra, of "denatured" language, actually infiltrates the unconscious and leaves individuals (a whole society) with a "denatured" identity and sense of self-worth – as if each was nothing more than a brand-labelled item for sale in a constantly changing brand-driven world. In his unfinished work, *The Inner Experience*, Merton called upon Freud's insights to present his notion of how an aspect of a person's "exterior self" can possibly become "unconscious." He argued that

> the exterior self is not limited to consciousness. Freud's concept of the superego as an infantile and introjected substitute for conscience fits very well my idea of the exterior and alienated self. It is at once completely exterior and yet at the same time buried in unconsciousness.[34]

This is a penetrating psychological insight and one that may help to explain why the hold of a mass-market, brand-saturated world is so powerful, for the roots of such a world, over time, bury themselves in the individual's unconscious. It perhaps also helps to explain why many people in contemporary society find themselves in a state of deadened (not heightened) sensibility from which they seek release in moments of escapist non-sense, which are explicitly marketed for them using these exact terms.

As a direct consequence of the condition in which an individual's "exterior and alienated self" is "buried in unconsciousness," Merton argues, a "fake interiorization" occurs. Although

he used this idea to talk about "false mysticism" and "pseudo-religiosity" it also helps to explain, on a more mundane level, the insidious hoax that can be spun by the world of *simulacra*: "Little children watch out for the simulacra!" or you'll be well and truly duped.

Merton's response to this type of cosmetic world was not to outwardly package Christianity as a more appealing "brand" for understanding life's meaning so that an individual can at least be offered the opportunity of "purchasing and identifying with the *right* product." It was to strongly reaffirm a vision of the unique person, made in the image of God, as distinct from the individual whose identity is always precarious, egotistically centered, and constantly in flux depending on what is "in fashion" at the time.[35] Merton explained his vision of person in the same way as he presented sapiential poetry, as "an experience and an attitude, rather than a system of thought."[36] The person, for Merton, and here his thoughts on wisdom and science are reiterated, was

> an intelligence open to the divine light, not merely to the study of objects – "observable data." The full dimension of personal fulfilment is to be sought not simply in knowledge and technical control of matter, but in contemplative wisdom which unites knowledge with love above and beyond the subject-object relationship which is characteristic of ordinary empirical observation.[37]

In Merton's view the person is not unlike the sapiential poem, for both proceed from the same source and both are formed through an act of re-creative perception of what lies at the heart of reality: the poet encountering wisdom through a particular object creates a genuine poem, while the individual encountering wisdom within his or her own being creates their own personal identity in that Image. In both the sapiential poem and the "created" person, wisdom can be found. And just as scientific knowledge in Merton's view was only a descriptive and "provisional" knowledge of reality, so too the individual's knowledge of himself or herself as a self-contained entity is only descriptive and "provisional," waiting to be completed through knowing wisely. Merton explained as much when he wrote:

> The individual matures and blossoms out in full personality only when the gift of spirit and of grace endows our natural

> capacities with unique and creative powers to *make our own gift* to our world and to other[s] . . . The person is the individual not only as member of the species but as "image of God," that is to say as the *free and creative source of a gift of love and meaning* which, if it is not made and given, is irreplaceable and cannot be given by another.[38]

On this last crucial point hangs the difference between a fulfilled, creative, Christian adult life and what is not. It is a vision that deepens that presented by Postman at the beginning of this paper. The movement of the self-conscious individual into the expansive consciousness of the person as a "free and creative source of a gift of love and meaning"—"which cannot be given by another"—is a movement from adolescence into adulthood and spiritually defines adulthood. An understanding of sapiential knowledge as presented through poetry can help facilitate this transition because it reveals wisdom as inherent in life and living.

Notes

1. Neil Postman, *The End of Education: Defining the Value of Schools* (New York: Vintage Books, 1995), pp. 17-18.

2. Postman, *End of Education*, p. 65.

3. Postman, *End of Education*, p. 67.

4. Postman, *End of Education*, p. 68

5. Postman, *End of Education*, p. 74.

6. Postman, *End of Education*, p. 78.

7. Postman, *End of Education*, pp. 83-84.

8. *The Intimate Merton* eds. Patrick Hart and Jonathon Montaldo (Oxford: Lion, 1999), p. 11; David D. Cooper, *Thomas Merton's Art of Denial: The Evolution of a Radical Humanist* (Athens: University of Georgia, 1989), p. 167.

9. Fred Newman and Lois Holzman, *The End of Knowing* (London: Routledge, 1997), p. 7.

10. Phil Cousineau, *The Way Things Are: Conversations with Huston Smith on the Spiritual Life* (Berkeley: University of California, 2003), p. 10.

11. Newman and Holzman, *End of Knowing*, p. 27.

12. Thomas Merton, *Contemplation in a World of Action* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1971), p. 190.

13. Merton, *Contemplation in a World of Action*, p. 190.

14. George Kilcourse, *Ace of Freedoms: Thomas Merton's Christ* (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame, 1993), p. 227.

15. Thomas Merton, *Hagia Sophia, The Collected Poems* (New York: New Directions, 1977), p. 363.

16. Edward Hirsch, *How to Read a Poem and Fall in Love with Poetry* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1999), p. 8.

17. Don Cupitt, *After God: The Future of Religion* (London: Weindenfeld & Nicolson, 1997), p. xv.

18. Kilcourse, *Ace of Freedoms*, p.66.

19. *The Literary Essays of Thomas Merton*, ed. Patrick Hart (New York: New Directions, 1981), p. 128.

20. Thomas Merton, *Praying the Psalms* (Collegeville, Minnesota: Liturgical Press, 1956).

21. Czeslaw Milosz, *A Book of Luminous Things* (New York: Harcourt & Brace, 1996), p. 3.

22. Thomas Merton, *Poetry and Imagination* [cassette recording] (Kansas City: Credence Cassettes, n.d.).

23. Rainer Maria Rilke, *Selected Poems* (Berkeley: University of California, 1984), p. 65.

24. D.T. Suzuki, *Zen and Japanese Culture* (Princeton: Princeton University, 1973); Kenneth Yasuda, *The Japanese Haiku: It's Essential Nature, History and Possibilities in English* (Tokyo: Charles E. Tuttle, 1973).

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