

## "Rising Up Out of the Center": Thomas Merton on Prayer

---

*Bonnie Thurston*

In a way, everything Thomas Merton wrote, said, and did was "about prayer," because, as I hope to demonstrate, he made no fundamental distinction between "life" and "prayer." As he remarked toward the end of his life, "you pray with your whole life."<sup>1</sup> That being the case, it is curious that there is so little secondary literature on Merton and prayer. Studies abound on Merton and monasticism, mysticism, contemplation, solitude and silence, but the most important secondary sources on prayer *per se*, of which I am aware, consist of the articles in *The Merton Encyclopedia*, John Higgins' 1973 book *Thomas Merton on Prayer*<sup>2</sup> and a series of essays by John Teahan.<sup>3</sup> Because there is so much primary Merton material on prayer, I have limited this essay fundamentally, though not exclusively, to things Merton wrote in the 1960s and particularly to his correspondence with Abdul Aziz and with Etta Gullick, a record by Br. David Steindl-Rast, O.S.B., of Merton's conversation with a group gathered in California on the eve of his Asian journey, and the talks he gave in Alaska in September and October, 1968. These last have been much underused by Merton scholars and are a rich source for his mature thought on prayer. One in particular, "Prayer and Conscience," is an extremely good summary of Merton's practical teaching on prayer.<sup>4</sup>

Br. David Steindl-Rast begins his essay "Man of Prayer" in the 1974 volume *Thomas Merton, Monk* by explaining that a small group of people had gathered in California to meet with Merton before he left for Asia. The plan was to discuss renewal in religious life, and the group had asked Merton to speak on prayer. Br. David records that Merton insisted "nothing that anyone says will be that important. The great thing is prayer. Prayer itself. If you want a life of prayer, the way to get to it is by praying."<sup>5</sup> That last sentence summarizes the general concerns of the present essay.

By the word "prayer" I do not think Merton meant "saying prayers." For him prayer was the disposition of the whole person

God-ward. That is, prayer is an attitude or a mode of being as much as it is a specific activity.<sup>6</sup> As Merton noted in another conference given late in his life at the Monastery of the Precious Blood in Alaska, "Prayer is not really just a way of addressing God out there somewhere. Prayer is opening up ... deepest conscience and consciousness...."<sup>7</sup> This echoes what he had written years earlier in *Thoughts in Solitude*: "Prayer is ... not just a formula of words ... it is the orientation of our whole body, mind and spirit to God in silence, attention, and adoration."<sup>8</sup> And this attitude is consistent with what he writes much later in *Contemplative Prayer*: "By 'prayer of the heart' we seek God himself present in the depths of our being and meet him there...."<sup>9</sup> Contemplation, he notes, "is essentially a listening in silence, an expectancy."<sup>10</sup>

Merton's writings do not evince any particular interest in prayer as the word is commonly used, that is, in petitionary prayer, coarsely understood as "asking God for things." As John Teahan notes in his article "Meditation and Prayer in Merton's Spirituality," "Merton gave little attention to the prayer of petition." "... he preferred silent prayer to vocal prayer."<sup>11</sup> I suggest one reason for this is Merton's awareness that we can hide behind words. As he put it in *Thoughts in Solitude*, "We put words between ourselves and things. Even God has become another conceptual unreality in a no-man's land of language that no longer serves as a means of communion with reality."<sup>12</sup>

What Merton does say about prayer of intercession is very beautiful and helpful. "We are not rainmakers, but Christians. In our dealings with God he is free and so are we. It's simply a need for me to express my love by praying for my friends; it's like embracing them. If you love another person, it's God's love being realized. One and the same love is reaching your friend through you, and you through your friend."<sup>13</sup> This echoes a remark in *Thoughts in Solitude*: "Prayer uses words to reverence beings in God."<sup>14</sup>

Merton's basic understanding is that our intercessory prayer for our friends is the way we love them. But more than this, it is the way God's love is brought to bear on human situations; "it's God's love being realized," as he says. Such a view undercuts any dualistic understanding of prayer, any sense of me / other / God, because self and other are both understood to be "in God" since "one and the same love is reaching your friend through you, and you through your friend."<sup>15</sup> There is no other love than God's,

because there is nothing else but God.<sup>16</sup> In the talk entitled "Prayer and Conscience," which was given in Alaska, Merton put this point as follows:

If I am going to pray validly and deeply, it will be with a consciousness of myself as being more than just myself when I pray. ... I am not just an individual when I pray .... When I pray I am, in a certain sense, everybody . . . because this deep consciousness when I pray is a place of encounter between myself and God and between the common love of everybody.<sup>17</sup>

Another reason Merton may have been less interested in vocal prayer than in wordless prayer was his own struggles with the liturgy and the offices in Cistercian life which for him seemingly tended toward dualism. Writing on Holy Thursday, April 3, 1947, Merton reflected, "As soon as I get to choir I am overwhelmed by distractions. No sense of the presence of God. No sense of anything except difficulty and struggle and pain. Objectively speaking I suppose it is more perfect to thank God through the liturgy. The choral office should be the best way of continuing one's Communion. For me it is the worst."<sup>18</sup> The operative words here are "should be." Merton felt he *ought* to be able to pray deeply in choir. But in fact, he could not always do so. Multiple entries in his journals in 1947, 1948 and 1949 bear this out. As Merton matured in monastic life and as a Christian, he realized that the life of prayer cannot be forced. For each of us, it is what it is. Allowing for that variousness and individuation is crucial to the success of real, deep and profound prayer.

About ten years later (ca. 1957) Merton wrote, "There has never been any question, in Christian tradition, of the fact that the most propitious atmosphere for real contemplation is the solitude of a hermit's cell. Corporate and liturgical prayer are indeed important in the life of the Church and of the monk but they do not of themselves satisfy the deep need for intimate contact with God in solitary prayer...."<sup>19</sup> From our vantage point, knowing as we do that Merton was moving toward life as a hermit, the passage has an authentic, autobiographical ring. He had heard the call of the hermitage early in his monastic life.

Having noted his difficulty with the choir offices, it is still true that the Psalms were at the heart of Merton's prayer during the whole of his monastic life. As Erlinda Paguio notes in her important article "Thomas Merton and the Psalms," "in the monastic

life the prayer of the community is made up above all of psalms."<sup>20</sup> In the 1950s Merton wrote two works on the Psalms, *Bread in the Wilderness* (1953), reflections on the Psalter intended primarily for monastics whose life is built around chanting them, and *Praying the Psalms* (1956), a pamphlet for laypersons. The Psalms, Merton reflected, "bring our hearts and minds into the presence of the living God" Who "will give Himself to us through the Psalter if we give ourselves to Him without reserve, in our recitation of the Psalms."<sup>21</sup> In the Psalms, Merton suggests, we recognize "our own experience lived out and perfected, orientated to God and made fruitful."<sup>22</sup> "There is no aspect of the interior life, no kind of religious experience, no spiritual need ... that is not depicted and lived out in the Psalms."<sup>23</sup>

Perhaps for this reason, even though he had difficulty chanting the Psalms in choir with the community, the Psalter itself was crucial to Merton's life of prayer for the whole of his life. On July 5, 1965 he spoke of the "greatest 'comfort' ... in the Psalms which face death as it is, under the eye of God, and teach us how we may face it—and bring us at the same time into contact, rather communion, with all those who have so seen death and accepted it. Most of all the Lord Himself who prayed from Psalm 21 on the Cross."<sup>24</sup> On July 19, 1965 Merton notes in his journal that he began a perpetual Psalter, "a necessity ... to keep the Psalter going from now on until I die (or can no longer do it). Need for the continuity the Psalter offers—continuity with my own past and with the past of eremitism."<sup>25</sup> Merton notes he will pray the Latin Psalter, and this is born out by a journal entry of December 15, 1966 that says "Words of my Latin psalms have been driving themselves home to me lately."<sup>26</sup>

I have suggested that for Merton prayer is turning of the whole person toward God, the opening of the heart to God: "...you cannot pray with your mind," he said, "You pray with your heart or with the depths of your being."<sup>27</sup> Clearly, as he understood and prayed it, the Psalter allowed him to turn and open to God "with the depths" and in communion with the whole Church. But Merton's own prayer life was also individuated, and so we turn now to the one account we have in which Merton describes his own prayer practice to see what can be learned from it about Merton's thinking on prayer. This will be an exercise in "theology gleaned from experience," although at one remove in that the experience is Merton's; the analysis is my own.

In November, 1960, upon the advice of the great Islamic scholar, Louis Massignon, a Pakistani Sufi, called Abdul Aziz, wrote to Merton. The resulting long correspondence was a very important one as it was Aziz who encouraged Merton's study of Sufism and subsequently his lectures on that subject to the monks at Gethsemani. The Merton-Aziz letters are one of the most complete records of a genuine Islamic-Christian dialogue on the personal level that the twentieth century offers. And it was to his friend, Abdul Aziz, the Pakistani Muslim, that Merton most fully revealed his own life of prayer. On January 2, 1966, in response to a question from Aziz about his own prayer practice, Merton wrote:

...you ask about my method of meditation. Strictly speaking I have a very simple way of prayer. It is centered entirely on attention to the presence of God and to His will and His love. ...it is centered on *faith* by which alone we can know the presence of God. One might say this gives my meditation the character described by the Prophet as "being before God as if you saw Him." Yet it does not mean imagining anything or conceiving a precise image of God, for to my mind this would be a kind of idolatry. ...it is a matter of adoring Him as invisible and infinitely beyond our comprehension, and realizing Him as all. My prayer tends very much toward what you call *fana*. There is in my heart this great thirst to recognize totally the nothingness of all that is not God. My prayer is then a kind of praise rising up out of the center of Nothing and Silence. If I am still present "myself" this I recognize as an obstacle about which I can do nothing unless He Himself removes the obstacle. If He wills He can make the Nothingness into a total clarity. If He does not will, then the Nothingness seems to itself to be an object and remains an obstacle. Such is my ordinary way of prayer, or meditation. It is not "thinking about" anything, but a direct seeking of the Face of the Invisible, which cannot be found unless we become lost in Him who is Invisible. I do not ordinarily write about such things and I ask you therefore to be discreet about it.<sup>28</sup>

This is a most remarkable passage in its personal intimacy, in what it reveals about Merton's assumptions about the practice of prayer and in its depth of understanding of Islamic spirituality. It is extraordinarily sensitive to Islam, its radical monotheism and abhorrence of *shirk* (idolatry, the cardinal sin in Islam). It uses the

language of Sufism (for example, *fana* which means "annihilation" or nullification of ego-consciousness) to express a very Christian concept, that of *kenosis*, the self-emptying of Jesus which, in Philippians 2:6-11, St. Paul holds up as the model for all Christians. The excerpt from Merton's letter suggests that in prayer the great Christian, Thomas Merton, emptied himself of all that was not God in order to be present to God Who is ALL.

Of the many things this passage reveals, I have isolated and will discuss the following five principles of prayer which are inherent in Merton's practice as he describes it to Aziz:

1. God is with us.
2. Prayer is a gift and as such cannot really be taught.
3. In prayer it is absolutely crucial to be present. We start where we are.
4. Two fundamental and relatively common difficulties in prayer are distractions and self-consciousness.
5. Intentionally and potentially, all of life is prayer.

### God is with us.

The idea that God is with us is a fundamental assertion of Christianity. Indeed, we call our Lord "Emmanuel," meaning "God with us" (Matthew 1:23). Merton's description of his prayer suggests it was primarily a matter of "attention to the presence of God."<sup>29</sup> St. Teresa of Avila is reputed to have said that all difficulties in prayer begin with the assumption that God is somewhere else. Merton made no such assumption; for him there was no *Deus absconditus*, no absent God. God is present to those who pray in three senses. First, God is present in an adjectival, geographic sense: here, at hand, "among us" to use St. Luke's happy turn of phrase. Second, God is present in an adverbial, temporal sense: now, existing at this moment. Third, God is present in a nominal sense: as gift, voluntarily given. This is why Merton stresses "*faith* by which alone we can know the presence of God."<sup>30</sup> God is present, here and now, as a present, a gift to the one who prays. God's presence in prayer is entirely gratuitous, given, not earned or forced or manipulated. As the Latin adage has it, *vocatus atque non vocatus, Deus aderit* which, loosely translated, means "whether we like it or not, God is with us."

**Prayer is a gift and as such cannot really be taught.**

Merton's prayer is centered on attention to the presence of God known by faith. Thus, like faith, prayer is a gift. In *Contemplative Prayer* Merton notes that true prayer "is not a psychological trick but a theological grace. It can come to us *only* as a gift, and not as a result of our own clever use of spiritual techniques."<sup>31</sup> The logical implication of this fact is that prayer cannot really be "taught." One might be able to help another to be disposed toward receiving the gift of prayer, but one cannot teach another person how to pray. And this is both because prayer is not a "technique" to be learned and perfected and because authentic prayer is as individualized as a fingerprint. Each of us must find our own way to pray. Indeed, the task of religious maturity is to find one's own language of prayer.

This simply highlights a point that Merton made several times in his writings. In the preface to *Spiritual Direction and Meditation* (1959) Merton begins, "You cannot learn meditation from a book. You just have to *meditate*." He speaks of the informality of the hints he will provide and of his "aversion to conventional and rigid systems." He is not, he says, opposed to discipline, but "it should be *one's own* discipline, not a routine mechanically imposed from the outside."<sup>32</sup> "Meditation is really very simple and there is not much need of elaborate techniques to teach us how to go about it."<sup>33</sup>

Similarly, writing to Etta Gullick (an Oxford-educated English woman with whom Merton corresponded extensively) on June 15, 1964 Merton says, "I do not think contemplation can be taught, but certainly an aptitude for it can be awakened." "... it is a question of showing ... in a mysterious way by example how to proceed. Not by the example of doing, but the example of being, and by one's attitude toward life and things."<sup>34</sup> Writing to Gullick on September 12, 1964 about contemplative prayer in the novitiate, Merton stated, "I don't use special methods. I try to make them [the novices] love the freedom and peace of being with God alone in faith and simplicity...."<sup>35</sup> This sounds remarkably like his own prayer as described to Abdul Aziz, and it continues to reflect Merton's reaction against overly rigid systems of prayer that do not take account of individual differences.

**In prayer is it absolutely crucial  
to be present. We start where we are.**

If, as Merton has said, prayer is attention to the presence of God, then being present is crucial to prayer, *is* in some sense prayer. Merton writes to Abdul Aziz that he places himself "before God as if [he] saw Him."<sup>36</sup> Put slightly differently, Merton makes himself present to the present God. Indeed, this is what he also said in the 1959 book on meditation: "In order to meditate, I have to withdraw my mind from all that prevents me from attending to God present in my heart."<sup>37</sup> Br. David Steindl-Rast remarked that "to start *where you are* and to become aware of the connections ... was Thomas Merton's approach to prayer" (emphasis mine).<sup>38</sup> Brother David reports that Merton also said, "In prayer we discover what we already have. You start where you are and you deepen what you already have, and you realize that you are already there. We already have everything, but we don't know it and we don't experience it. Everything has been given to us in Christ. All we need is to experience what we already possess."<sup>39</sup>

The implication is that one must be present where she is, must give both time and the fullness of one's self to prayer. "If we really want prayer," Merton said, "we'll have to give it time. We must slow down to a human tempo." "...We live in the fullness of time. Every moment is God's own good time, his *kairos*. The whole thing boils down to giving ourselves in prayer a chance to realize that we have what we seek. We don't have to rush after it. It is there all the time, and if we give it time it will make itself known to us."<sup>40</sup>

This is exactly the advice he had given to Sr. Thérèse Lentfoehr when he wrote to her about prayer on August 29, 1949:

...have you a garden or somewhere that you can walk in, by yourself? Take half an hour, or fifteen minutes a day and just walk up and down among the flower beds .... Do not try to think about anything in particular and when thoughts about work, etc. come to you, do not try to push them out by main force, but see if you can't drop them just by relaxing your mind. Do this because you "are praying" and because our Lord is with you. But if thoughts about work will not go away, accept them idly and without too much eagerness with intention of letting our Lord reveal His will to you through these thoughts....<sup>41</sup>



Merton articulated the same point more generally in 1958 in *Thoughts in Solitude*: "If we want to be spiritual ... let us first of all live our lives. Let us not fear the responsibilities and the inevitable distractions of the work appointed for us by the will of God. Let us embrace reality and thus find ourselves immersed in the life-giving will and wisdom of God which surrounds us everywhere."<sup>42</sup>

**Two fundamental and relatively common difficulties  
in prayer are distractions and self-consciousness.**

For Merton prayer is basically attentiveness to the presence of God which is a gift given in the present moment. One hears in this understanding the influence of his studies of Buddhism, and particularly of Zen, which stresses "being present where we are." To be fully present is not as easy as it may sound. Most of us are not where we are. We are "somewhere else," for example, dwelling in regret about the past or anxiety about the future. Such attitudes are real hindrances to prayer, hindrances which are traditionally termed "distractions" and "self-consciousness."

The matter of distractions in prayer has been alluded to in the letter to Sr. Thérèse Lentfoehr already quoted. Very simply, distractions are the thoughts that fill our heads when we attempt to pray, when we attempt to become fully present in the moment and open to God. In the life of prayer such distractions are inevitable. The important thing is not to give them energy by "fighting" them. That would be like trying to put out a fire by pouring gasoline on it. Merton's advice that distractions should be accepted "idly and without too much eagerness"<sup>43</sup> is extremely practical. He said nearly the same thing in an Alaskan conference: "What do you do with distractions? You either simply let them pass by and ignore them, or you let them pass by and be perfectly content to have them. If you don't pay attention to them, the distractions don't remain."<sup>44</sup> That is, one recognizes the thought or feeling that is a distraction, but doesn't think or feel it; one simply lets it "pass through." Merton continues, "If you don't wrestle with distractions wildly and just let them go by for a while, they get less and less, and after a while there is nothing much left."<sup>45</sup>

One reason people have so much trouble with distractions in prayer involves self-consciousness. Merton alluded to it in his letter to Abdul Aziz when he spoke of *fana* (annihilation of ego, becoming lost in God). The obstacle is being present to myself. Specifically, it is the problem of "watching ourselves" as we pray, and

the more general problem of being self-absorbed in our own spiritual quest and with our own spirituality. In the sort of prayer of which Merton writes to Aziz, "self" recedes, as Merton noted: "If I am still present 'myself' this I recognize as an obstacle...."<sup>46</sup> Writing to Etta Gullick on October 29, 1962, Merton noted, "There is too much conscious 'spiritual life' floating around us, and we are too aware that we are supposed to get somewhere. Well, where? If you reflect, the answer turns out to be a word that is never very close to any kind of manageable reality. If that is the case, perhaps we are already in that where."<sup>47</sup> In short, self-consciously worrying about making progress in prayer (as if one were learning to bowl or play tennis!), first, makes one self-conscious and, second, deflects one from the truth of the Presence in the present into which one simply "relaxes" or even "melts."<sup>48</sup>

On August 1, 1966 Merton returned to this same idea in his correspondence with Mrs. Gullick. Obviously once again (at her prompting?) addressing "progress in prayer" he says, "the chief obstacle to progress is too much self-awareness and to talk about 'how to make progress' is a good way to make people too aware of themselves. In the long run I think progress in prayer comes from the Cross and humiliation and whatever makes us really experience our total poverty and nothingness, and also gets our mind off ourselves."<sup>49</sup> (Those who worry about Merton's orthodoxy might note the profoundly Christian groundedness of this formulation.) In his letter to Abdul Aziz Merton had said of his own prayer, "If I am still present 'myself' this I recognize as an obstacle," but this obstacle is one about which he can do nothing himself. He must wait for God to remove the obstacle, not struggle with it or against himself. In short, prayer is modeled by the *kenosis* (self-emptying) of Jesus and is received as a grace God gives.

In *Thoughts in Solitude* Merton wrote, "A man knows when he has found his vocation when he stops thinking about how to live and begins to live."<sup>50</sup> For our purposes a paraphrase might read, "A person knows she has 'learned' to pray when she stops thinking about prayer and worrying about herself and her 'progress' and prays." And that leads to Merton's understanding that, ultimately, all of life is prayer.

### **Intentionally and potentially, all of life is prayer.**

As Merton describes it to Abdul Aziz, prayer is as much a state of being (being present) as it is a particular, differentiated activity.

This is because, as Merton already noted in *Thoughts in Solitude*, "As soon as a man is fully disposed to be alone with God, he is alone with God no matter where he may be...."<sup>51</sup> If, as Christians assert, God is Emmanuel, with us, and if, as Merton asserts, prayer is being disposed toward God in the present, then it is actually possible, as St. Paul commanded the Thessalonians, to "pray ceaselessly" (1 Thessalonians 5:17) by maintaining the prayer disposition or attentiveness constantly.

One can be constantly turned toward and open to God. Indeed, for Merton this is the whole object of the spiritual life. "What I object to about 'the Spiritual Life,'" he wrote to Etta Gullick, "is the fact that it is a part, a section, set off as if it were a whole. It is an aberration to set off our 'prayer' etc. from the rest of our existence, as if we were sometimes spiritual, sometimes not." "...Our 'life in the Spirit' is all-embracing, or should be."<sup>52</sup> Therefore, as he noted in *Contemplative Prayer*, "A false supernaturalism which imagines that 'the supernatural' is a kind of Platonic realm of abstract essences totally apart from and opposed to the concrete world of nature, offers no real support to a genuine life of meditation and prayer. Meditation has no point and no reality unless it is firmly rooted in life."<sup>53</sup>

One of the great, frequently commented upon and written about themes in Merton's writing is that of identity. Many people have been greatly helped by Merton's articulation of the false and true self, "little-s" self and "big-S" self, so clearly presented, for example, in chapters 4-7 of *New Seeds of Contemplation*.<sup>54</sup> The connection to our discussion is that Merton points in the direction of understanding prayer as one's authentic, Christian identity: we are our prayer. In prayer, "we seek first of all the deepest ground of our identity in God."<sup>55</sup> Thus, as he taught in Alaska, we pray with our entire life ("...you pray with your whole life."<sup>56</sup>). As Brother David Steindl-Rast remarked, "Finding your true self and living a life of prayer were not two things for Thomas Merton, but one."<sup>57</sup> Chapter 12 of *Thoughts in Solitude* opens with this very important observation: "If you want to have a spiritual life you must unify your life. A life is either all spiritual or not spiritual at all. No man can serve two masters. Your life is shaped by the end you live for. You are made in the image of what you desire."<sup>58</sup>

The need to overcome dualisms like self/other or self/God or life/prayer is one of Thomas Merton's most profound insights. His mature teaching on prayer strikes at the heart of all dualism

because he teaches that being present *is* prayer. As he said in *Contemplation in a World of Action*, "The real purpose of prayer ... is the deepening of personal realization in love, the awareness of God."<sup>59</sup> Merton thinks that we are already *in* a state of prayer, *in* God. We must "wake up to it" so to speak. In centering "entirely on attention to the presence of God and to His will and His love," directly "seeking the Face of the Invisible,"<sup>60</sup> we can, indeed, be "made [or I would say "re-made"] in the image of what [we] desire."<sup>61</sup> The process of being re-formed in God's image by prayer is what Orthodoxy calls "deification in Christ." In my view, it is this to which Merton's most mature teaching on prayer calls us. "What you have to do," Merton says, "is have this deeper consciousness of here I am and here is God and here are all these things which all belong to God. He and I and they are all involved in one love and everything manifests His goodness. Everything that I experience really reaches Him in some way or other. Nothing is an obstacle. He is in everything."<sup>62</sup>

As he was leaving for Asia, as he embarked on his final journey, speaking to that small group of men and women seeking renewal in religious life, Merton asked rhetorically, "What do we want, if not to pray? O.K., now, pray."<sup>63</sup> And then he asked the more profound question, and the one that haunts me: "What is keeping us back from living lives of prayer? Perhaps we don't really want to pray. This is the thing we have to face."<sup>64</sup>

## Notes

1. Robert E. Daggy, ed., *Thomas Merton in Alaska* (New York: New Directions, 1989) p. 129.

2. John J. Higgins, S.J., *Thomas Merton on Prayer* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1973). The work was first published by Cistercian Publications in 1971 under the title *Merton's Theology of Prayer*.

3. These include "A Dark and Empty Way: Thomas Merton and the Apophatic Tradition," *Journal of Religion* 58 (1978), pp. 263-287; "Meditation and Prayer in Merton's Spirituality," *American Benedictine Review* 30 (1979), pp. 107-133; "Solitude: A Central Motif in Thomas Merton's Life and Writings," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 50 (1982), pp. 521-538.

4. The essay appears in *Thomas Merton in Alaska* and was also published in *Sisters Today* 41 (1971).

5. Br. David Steindl-Rast, O.S.B., "Man of Prayer," in *Thomas Merton, Monk*, Br. Patrick Hart, O.C.S.O., ed., (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1974), p. 79.

6. For an exposition of this idea see my article "Prayer: A Mode of Being" published serially in *Spirituality* 10/52 (2004) and 10/53 (2004).

7. Daggy, *Thomas Merton in Alaska*, pp. 130-131.

8. Thomas Merton, *Thoughts in Solitude* (New York: Farrar, Straus & Cudahy, 1956), p. 48.

9. Thomas Merton, *Contemplative Prayer* (New York: Doubleday/Image, 1969/71), pp. 30-31. The masculine references are Merton's. In the interest of accuracy, if not of inclusivity, I maintain Merton's exact usage throughout this essay.

10. Merton, *Contemplative Prayer*, p. 90.

11. Teahan, "Meditation and Prayer in Merton's Spirituality," p. 114.

12. Merton, *Thoughts in Solitude*, p. 85.

13. Hart, *Thomas Merton, Monk*, p. 88.

14. Merton, *Thoughts in Solitude*, p. 69.

15. Hart, *Thomas Merton, Monk*, p. 88.

16. This, of course, is the logical conclusion of radical monotheism of the sort that Merton encountered in Sufi literature, especially in the writing of Al Hallaj.

17. Daggy, *Thomas Merton in Alaska*, pp. 134-135.

18. Thomas Merton, *The Sign of Jonas* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1953), p. 37.

19. Thomas Merton, *The Silent Life* (New York: Farrar, Straus & Cudahy, 1957), p. 149.

20. Erlinda Paguio, "Thomas Merton and the Psalms," *The Merton Seasonal* 22/4 (1997), p. 12.

21. Thomas Merton, *Bread in the Wilderness* (New York: New Directions, 1953), pp. 13 and 47.

22. Thomas Merton, *Praying the Psalms* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1956), p. 16.

23. Merton, *Praying the Psalms*, p. 31.

24. Robert E. Daggy, ed., *Dancing in the Water of Life: The Journals of Thomas Merton 1963-1965* (San Francisco: Harper San Francisco, 1995), p. 264.

25. Daggy, ed., *Dancing in the Water of Life*, p. 273.

26. Christine M. Bochen, ed., *Learning to Love: The Journals of Thomas Merton 1966-1967* (San Francisco: Harper San Francisco, 1997), p. 170.

27. Daggy, *Thomas Merton in Alaska*, p. 81.

28. William H. Shannon, ed., *Thomas Merton, The Hidden Ground of Love, Letters* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1985), pp. 63-64.

29. Shannon, *Hidden Ground of Love*, p. 63.
30. Shannon, *Hidden Ground of Love*, p. 63.
31. Merton, *Contemplative Prayer*, p. 92.
32. Thomas Merton, *Spiritual Direction and Meditation* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1959). No pagination in the Preface
33. Merton, *Spiritual Direction and Meditation*, p. 68.
34. Shannon, *Hidden Ground of Love*, p. 367.
35. Shannon, *Hidden Ground of Love*, p. 368.
36. Shannon, *Hidden Ground of Love*, p. 63.
37. Merton, *Spiritual Direction and Meditation*, pp. 68-69.
38. Hart, *Thomas Merton, Monk*, p. 80.
39. Hart, *Thomas Merton, Monk*, p. 80.
40. Hart, *Thomas Merton, Monk*, p. 81.
41. Quoted in Christine M. Bochen, ed., *Thomas Merton: Essential Writings* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2000), p. 83.
42. Merton, *Thoughts in Solitude*, pp. 46-47.
43. Bochen, *Thomas Merton: Essential Writings*, p. 83.
44. Daggy, *Thomas Merton in Alaska*, p. 138.
45. Daggy, *Thomas Merton in Alaska*, p. 139.
46. Shannon, *Hidden Ground of Love*, p. 64.
47. Shannon, *Hidden Ground of Love*, p. 355.
48. The terms "relaxes" and "melts" are mine, not Merton's, but I think they accurately describe what he is suggesting.
49. Shannon, *Hidden Ground of Love*, p. 376.
50. Merton, *Thoughts in Solitude*, p. 87.
51. Merton, *Thoughts in Solitude*, p. 96.
52. Shannon, *Hidden Ground of Love*, p. 357.
53. Merton, *Contemplative Prayer*, p. 39.
54. Thomas Merton, *New Seeds of Contemplation* (New York: New Directions, 1961).
55. Merton, *Contemplative Prayer*, p. 67.
56. Daggy, *Thomas Merton in Alaska*, p. 129.
57. Hart, *Thomas Merton, Monk*, p. 85.
58. Merton, *Thoughts in Solitude*, p. 56.
59. Quoted in *Thomas Merton: Essential Writings*, p. 86.
60. Shannon, *Hidden Ground of Love*, pp. 63-64.
61. Merton, *Thoughts in Solitude*, p. 56.
62. Daggy, *Thomas Merton in Alaska*, p. 140.
63. Hart, *Thomas Merton, Monk*, p. 84.
64. Hart, *Thomas Merton, Monk*, p. 85.