

# Builders of the Kingdom of Heaven on Earth: The Transforming Power of Agape Love in King and Merton

By **Cristóbal Serrán-Pagán y Fuentes**

This paper examines the mystical theology of love in the writings of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and Thomas Merton, and explores the way mystical love calls the person into action. This type of love seeks redemption, reconciliation and renewal in society, leading to the creation of the beloved community, or what Christian theologians call the kingdom of heaven on earth. Both King and Merton sacrificed their lives in the pursuit of building a more just and humane society where each sentient and non-sentient being is respected and valued. They both understood the unique role each being plays in the unfolding drama of the universe. For them, a true mystic is one who, out of his or her direct encounter with the divine, actively engages and participates in the social and spiritual struggles of his or her time. Paradoxically, their mystical vision led them to transform society at large by becoming fully engaged in the non-violent protests against racism, poverty and the war in Vietnam.

## 1. *King, Merton, and the Yungbluts*

Merton was in contact with the King family through mutual friends, especially the Quaker peace activists from Atlanta, June and John Yungblut. He also knew about King's activities through the Fellowship of Reconciliation and through common friends such as the Berrigans, Thich Nhat Hanh, and Jim Forest. June Yungblut was a doctoral student at Emory University when she started corresponding with Merton.<sup>1</sup> June passed a copy of an article Merton had written on Nat Turner to Dr. King, and later served as an intermediary between Coretta King and Merton after her husband was tragically assassinated.

June and John Yungblut suggested to King that he should visit Merton at Gethsemani as a time for rest and reflection. They both knew that King the activist needed to take a short break from his hectic life so he could relax and be with other spiritual leaders before going to march in Washington later in 1968. Merton was very excited to have Dr. King as his special guest. In a letter dated January 20, 1968, Merton writes to June:

About the other letter: of course we are available any time to any one wanting to make a retreat, and if Dr. King prefers to come before the March, well and good, fine with us. The only thing was that from the long-term viewpoint, since the new Abbot opened our first official conversation in his new capacity by saying he wanted me to stick to my bloody mysticism and not get involved in all them outward works, it might be well to go a little slow on anything that



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might signify a tie-in with some onslaught on the bastions of squaredom. He is essentially open, just inexperienced and still a little closed in on set positions, but I think he can learn, given time. To have Dr. King, Vincent Harding and others here later in the year for a quiet, informal, deeply reflective session would probably get the Abbot to see where I really do belong, halfway between in and out of the action. Not just all the way out.<sup>2</sup>

Unfortunately Dr. King was killed before visiting Merton in the hills of Kentucky. They might have met in a retreat at the Abbey of Gethsemani if King had not been shot in Memphis that historic day, April 4, 1968. A day letter, Merton writes the following note to June:

By a strange coincidence, I happened to be out in Lexington when Martin was shot and I heard all the news at once, instead of remaining for a day or more without finding out. What a terrible thing: and yet I felt that he was expecting it. In fact, almost at the very time of the murder I saw the TV film of his speech the previous night and heard what he said, in the place where we were eating a sandwich before starting home. A few moments later, the news came through on the car radio. This all means something more serious that we can imagine. But he, at any rate, has done all that any man can do. It will be to his glory (*HGL* 644-45).

A few months later, June reflects on her friend's death and writes to Tom: "I shall never stop feeling the poignancy of Martin's not having the retreat with you because of feeling he had to go to Memphis on the very weekend that he more-or-less indicated a retreat at Gethsemani might be a possibility."<sup>3</sup>

June Yungblut kept Merton well informed about the sadness she witnessed while being at the King family's home in the aftermath of Martin's death. One of the most striking thoughts that June reports in her letters to Merton is that "[t]here is no bitterness at Martin's Church or home. Coretta went to Memphis for him and brought him back."<sup>4</sup> Merton asked June to pass a message of personal condolence to Coretta. Merton also hoped that some of his "Freedom Songs" might be performed during Dr. King's memorial. Clearly the Trappist monk felt the loss of a friend whom he never met. Merton needed to show his deep sympathy to the King family by reaching out to them in a time of crisis. He sent them a message of faith, courage, hope and love.

## 2. *The Prophetic Mysticism of King and Merton*

Although many people still think of King simply as a political activist and of Merton as a contemplative monk, the fact is that the two of them were among the greatest prophets and mystics of the twentieth century. Both King and Merton were fully engaged in the socio-religious struggles of their time. Their prophetic witness has its root in their mystical calling and shared vision of the divine. I consider both of them prophetic mystics. By "prophetic mysticism" I do not mean their ability to foresee the future, but that King and Merton became instruments of God's plan. They both were fully committed to bear witness to truth, justice, and love, even if that meant sacrificing their lives for God's glory. Their prophetic response to social injustices is ultimately rooted in their innermost experience of the divine.

The Christian mystic is one who has experienced God at the deepest center of his or her soul. This immediate, direct experience of God is what Paul Tillich calls an encounter with "ultimate reality." The mystic returns to the world enriched and transformed by this loving knowledge of God. At this point the mystic feels the presence of God everywhere, even in the midst of terrible pain and suffering. Yet prophetic mystics like King and Merton acknowledged that God is not ultimately re-

sponsible for the source of that suffering. And it is because of their mystical experiences that these two modern prophets were called to bear witness to the social injustices of their time.

King and Merton wanted to share the good news of their mystical revelations with other people because God did not want them to keep this precious loving knowledge just for themselves. The prophetic mystic is called by God to partake in a responsible manner in building the kingdom of heaven on earth, which is salvation in the here and now. This Christian discipleship entails a certain way of acting. That means the Christian road to salvation is marked by selfless service. As prophets, they are responsible for sharing God's message not only among the oppressed but also with the oppressors.

Both King and Merton had glimpses of God's glory while they were alive. They felt the presence of Christ in all things, like some of the early Christians. King bore witness to his divine calling after receiving a death threat in Montgomery during the bus boycott. He could not sleep after an angry voice threatened his life. He went to the kitchen to prepare coffee. In the middle of that night, after feeling completely abandoned, God revealed Himself to King and spoke divine utterances to the prophet's heart, as the God of Israel did when the still small voice within spoke to Moses through the burning bush. This time the only thing burning was a pot of coffee. Here is King's testimony of his mystical faith:

At that moment I experienced the presence of the Divine as I had never before experienced him. It seemed as though I could hear the quiet assurance of an inner voice, saying, "Stand up for righteousness, stand up for truth. God will be at your side forever." Almost at once my fears began to pass from me. My uncertainty disappeared. I was ready to face anything. The outer situation remained the same, but God had given me inner calm. Three nights later, our home was bombed. Strangely enough, I accepted the word of the bombing calmly. My experience with God had given me a new strength and trust. I knew now that God is able to give us the interior resources to face the storms and problems of life.<sup>5</sup>

In his famous sermon "I See the Promised Land," delivered at Mason Temple just one day before he was killed in Memphis, King announces the following prophetic message coming out of his mystical experience:

And then I got into Memphis. And some began to say the threats, or talk about the threats that were out. What would happen to me from some of our sick white brothers? Well, I don't know what will happen now. We've got difficult days ahead. But it doesn't matter with me now. Because I've been to the mountaintop. And I don't mind. Like anybody, I would like to live a long life. Longevity has its place. But I'm not concerned about that now. I just want to do God's will. And He's allowed me to go up to the mountain. And I've looked over. And I've seen the promised land. I may not get there with you. But I want you to know tonight, that we, as a people will get to the promised land. And I'm happy, tonight. I'm not worried about anything. I'm not fearing any man. Mine eyes have seen the glory of the coming of the Lord (King 286).

In Christian circles this felt divine presence of the coming of the Lord is known as the Parousia, or as the return of Christ in glory. As Merton observes, the primitive Christian "proclaims that the messianic kingdom has come and bears witness to the presence of the Kyrios Pantocrator in mystery even in the midst of the conflicts and turmoil of the world."<sup>6</sup> Like King, Merton experienced the presence of the divine in unexpected places. For King, God's revelations took place in the kitchen. As

for Merton, his epiphany took place in the midst of Louisville's financial and shopping district. Later on Merton described having another mystical experience while gazing at the famous giant Buddha statues of Polonnaruwa, during his trip to Asia.

King might have agreed with Merton that we are living in a new heaven and in a new earth because the kingdom is already present in the world. The problem is that many Christians have forgotten or abandoned the primitive Christian ideal of the messianic age. By God's grace, King and Merton felt the responsibility to work towards building the heavenly kingdom here on earth, especially by serving those who suffer. The reason behind this, they say, is that we must serve the poor in spirit if we want to do God's will here on earth. And this idea is rooted in the gospels where it is said that one cannot love God without loving our neighbor.

Thus the prophetic mystic faces the paradoxical nature of this human-divine encounter by realizing in his or her own flesh that this blessing becomes a burden. It is clear to me that King and Merton knew from their mystical experience of faith that God is within us and among us. Because they encountered God at the deepest center of their soul they could say without a doubt that each one of us is called to become a messenger or a friend of God. True Christian prophetic mystics are those who are able to integrate a contemplative love for the glory and honor of God and an apostolic and social commitment for their neighbor and for all creation. As William Johnston says, "I believe that the great prophets were mystics in action – their inner eye was awakened so that they saw not only the glory of God but also the suffering, the injustice, the inequality, the sin of the world. This drove them into action and often led to their death. And just as the great prophets were mystics, so the great mystics had a prophetic role."<sup>77</sup>

King's and Merton's prophetic mysticism is primarily rooted in the Judeo-Christian biblical tradition, and yet not completely deprived of other mystical influences from abroad. As a matter of fact, these two Christian mystics were strongly influenced by Mohandas Gandhi and his spirituality of ahimsa, or nonviolence. Ironically, Gandhi himself was highly inspired by Jesus' words in the Sermon on the Mount. Clearly the Bible plays an essential role in understanding the prophetic messages of King and Merton. Both men often quote from the Gospel of Luke to point out the distinction between the active life and the contemplative life by citing the famous biblical quote: "Martha, Martha, you are anxious and troubled about many things; one thing is needful. Mary has chosen the good portion, which shall not be taken away from her" (Luke 10:38-42). The exegetical problem that this biblical text poses to them is whether or not active apostolic work in itself promotes union with God and leads practitioners to salvation. Ultimately, King and Merton found a way to solve the apparent contradiction between the active (or prophetic) life, symbolized by the busy Martha, and the contemplative (or mystical) life, represented by the quiet Mary. They thought of apostolic service as a peculiar way of prayer and as a way of worshipping the Lord because God is not a fixed, remote object. Like other Christian prophets and mystics, King and Merton believed that their selfless service and love can be redemptive since the kingdom of God is already within us and around us. In reality, King's and Merton's love for their neighbor and for one's enemy is an extension of their true love for God.

### 3. *The Mystical Theologies of Agape Love in King and Merton*

In the Judeo-Christian tradition theologians distinguish between *eros* (erotic or romantic love), *philia* (love between friends) and *agape* (unconditional or disinterested love). Christian mystical theologians often incorporate elements of these three types of love in their writings. To proclaim that *agape* love is contrary to *eros* or *philia* is a disservice to the Christian community and to the world at large. *Agape* love, therefore, seeks love in human relations and in a community of friends. King proclaims:

*Agape* is not a weak, passive love. It is love in action. *Agape* is love seeking to preserve and create community. It is insistence on community even when one seeks to break it. *Agape* is a willingness to go to any length to restore community. . . . The cross is the eternal expression of the length to which God will go in order to restore broken community. The resurrection is a symbol of God's triumph over all the forces that seek to block community. . . . He who works against community is working against the whole of creation. In the final analysis, *agape* means recognition of the fact that all life is interrelated. All humanity is involved in a single process, and all men are brothers. To the degree that I harm my brother, no matter what he is doing to me, to that extent I am harming myself. . . . Whether we call it an unconscious process, an impersonal Brahman, or a Personal Being of matchless power and infinite love, there is a creative force in this universe that works to bring the disconnected aspects of reality into a harmonious whole (King 20).

For King, love in action is an ideal that can be preached and can be implemented in our daily lives. Nonviolence is the means by which the true prophetic mystic lives his or her life. Thus nonviolence is not just a tactic but a way of life. After all, King was able to create, in the midst of a harsh environment of hatred and resentment, a non-violent movement rooted in the Christian social ethics of the Gospels and in Gandhian principles. King summarizes his philosophy of nonviolence in his essay "The Negro Revolution – Why 1963?" by saying that "Nonviolence is a powerful and just weapon. It is a weapon unique in history, which cuts without wounding and ennoble the man who wields it. It is a sword that heals. Both a practical and a moral answer to the Negro's cry for justice, nonviolent direct action proved that it could win victories without losing wars, and so became the triumphant tactic of the Negro Revolution of 1963" (King 14).

King thinks of nonviolence as a powerful moral force which makes room for social transformation, as he stated in receiving the Nobel Peace Prize in Oslo, on December 10, 1964. For King, love is the ultimate solution; that is to say, King's eschatology is rooted in a mystical vision of God, where everyone, including the enemy, is seen as a full member of the beloved community. In the final analysis, King believes that love will overcome evil. This theological assumption rests in his belief in the existence of God not as a mere abstraction but as an experience of the living God in his heart. In his contribution to the famous series for *The Christian Century*, "How My Mind Has Changed," King states:

In the midst of outer dangers I have felt an inner calm and known resources of strength that only God could give. In many instances I have felt the power of God transforming the fatigue of despair into the buoyancy of hope. I am convinced that the universe is under the control of a loving purpose and that in the struggle for righteousness man has cosmic companionship. Behind the harsh appearances of the world there is a benign power. To say God is personal is not to make him an object among other objects or attribute to him the finiteness and limitations of human personality. . . . So in the truest sense of the word, God is a living God. In him there is feeling and will, responsive to the deepest yearnings of the human heart: this God both evokes and answers prayers (King 40).

For Merton, the dichotomies presented to us by some traditionalist perspectives between *eros* and *agape*, prophetic (or apostolic) action and mystical contemplation, love for our neighbor and love for God, are no longer valid. The truth is that Martha and Mary are sisters. They are inseparable.

Martha is no longer seen as one who is inferior to Mary because of her activism. In fact, Martha's personal devotion to God is shown in her daily activities doing merciful acts of love while working in the midst of the world. Merton writes, "There is no contradiction between action and contemplation when Christian apostolic activity is raised to the level of pure charity. On that level, action and contemplation are fused into one entity by the love of God and of our brother in Christ."<sup>8</sup> Merton believed this is the true sign of perfect contemplation which is observed in charity, in *caritas*. This concept needs to be rightly understood in the context of compassion, of empathy, of reaching out to the *anawim*, to the disinherited people. As Merton rightly observes:

Christianity is essentially the revelation of the divine mercy in the mystery of Christ and his Church. Infinite mercy, infinite love are revealed to the world, made *evident* to the world in the sanctity of the Mystical Body of Christ, united in charity, nourished by the sacramental mystery of the Eucharist in which all participate in the divine *agape*, the sacrifice of the word made flesh. To say Christianity is the revelation of love means not simply that Christians are (or should be) nice charitable people. It means that love is the key to life itself and to the whole meaning of the cosmos and of history. If Christians, then, are without love they deprive all other men of access to the central truth that gives meaning to all existence (*PPCE* 128).

Merton envisioned a mysticism of action which leads to social and political involvement, especially since his contemplative experience is no longer divorced from his activism. Merton summarized his "engaged Christianity" by referring to the prophetic witness of a German Jesuit priest (Fr. Alfred Delp) whose message is "not of a politician, but of a mystic. Yet this mystic recognized his inescapable responsibility to be involved in politics. And because he followed messengers of God into the midst of a fanatical and absurd political crisis, he was put to death for his pains."<sup>9</sup> Merton further writes: "The place of the mystic and the prophet in the twentieth century is not totally outside of society, not utterly remote from the world. Spirituality, religion, mysticism are not an unequivocal rejection of the human race in order to seek one's own individual salvation without concern for the rest of men. Nor is true worship a matter of standing aside and praying for the world, without any concept of its problems and its desperation" (*PP* 148).

Merton endorsed the enlightened response by Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. who in the midst of personal and collective suffering had the courage to resist evil actions caused by an unjust societal order that kept the African-American race and other minorities as second-class citizens. In 1963, Merton had written in his "Letters to a White Liberal" that King was "*the last chance* to really do something by a peaceful revolution and that it was perhaps already too late" (*PP* 287). Merton, like King, denounced the identity imposed on "Negroes" by white supremacists and white liberals who had repeatedly blocked their path towards liberation. Merton points out:

In their struggle for integration into American society, the Negroes not only have to contend with the hostility and opposition of the whites, who are tormented by unconscious guilt and fear, but above all they have to face guilt, fear, inertia, and passivity in themselves. . . . Fortunately the Negroes have a leader who is a man of grace, who understands the law of love, who understands the mystery of the greatest secret grace that has been *given to the Negro and to no other*.<sup>10</sup>

King writes in his "Letter from Birmingham Jail," dated April 16, 1963:

I must confess that over the past few years I have been gravely disappointed with

the white moderate. I have almost reached the regrettable conclusion that the Negro's great stumbling block in his stride toward freedom is not the White Citizen's Councilor or the Ku Klux Klanner, but the white moderate, who is more devoted to "order" than to justice; who prefers a negative peace which is the absence of tension to a positive peace which is the presence of justice; who constantly says: "I agree with you in the goal you seek, but I cannot agree with your methods of direct action"; who paternalistically believes he can set the timetable for another man's freedom; who lives by a mythical concept of time and who constantly advises the Negro to wait for a "more convenient season."<sup>11</sup>

Merton said that "Martin Luther King, who is no fanatic but a true Christian, writes a damning letter from Birmingham jail, saying that the churches have utterly failed the Negro. . . . Not that there is not a certain amount of liberal and sincere concern for civil rights among Christians, even among ministers, priests, and bishops. But what is this sincerity worth?" (*CGB* 275). Merton gives credit to Bayard Rustin when he said that without both white Protestants and Catholics the Civil Rights bill in 1964 would not have been passed. However, Merton, like King, understood that the churches and white liberals were part of the establishment and part of the problem since religious and lay members support the power structures of society.

King and Merton chose preaching and writing as their prophetic medium for speaking out against the injustices committed in the name of God. King directed all his energies to the realm of action through marches and other exterior means. Merton, on the other hand, supported King's activism from his monastic setting through prayer and through his public condemnations of racism, poverty and the unnecessary war in Vietnam, all of which affected directly the Black community. The Baptist minister and the Trappist monk were well aware of the urgent necessity for Black Americans and all other oppressed people to form communities of resistance so they could fight back nonviolently against the economic and racial injustices that were so much rooted in the American society of their time. They thought that the real answer to the problem of racial discrimination was *agape* love, and nonviolent resistance was their spiritual weapon. Neither one claimed originality. They were simply trying to recover the old prophets' message found in the religion of Jesus. Both King and Merton followed Jesus' commandment of loving God and loving our neighbor as well as our enemies.

Both King and Merton died in 1968. King was assassinated in Memphis, Tennessee, on April 4, 1968, while he was bearing witness to the social injustices inflicted by the city of Memphis against hundred of sanitation workers who were exercising their right to go on strike. How many Christians today will put their personal interests behind so they can defend the poorest of the poor, the *anawim*, following the footsteps of Jesus of Nazareth, or modern prophets like King and Merton?

Merton was devastated when he received the news about King's assassination. Merton's sense of hope was diminished, as the correspondence with June Yungblut corroborates. A few months after King's death, on December 10, 1968, Merton received an electric shock from a faulty fan while he was coming out from the shower in Bangkok, Thailand, attending a monastic conference. Ironically, Merton the peacemaker lost his life in his beloved Asia after denouncing on numerous occasions the American participation in Vietnam. His body was transported to North America from an Air Force Base. Accompanying him in the journey were the dead bodies of American soldiers killed in war.

Both King and Merton believed that the root of war and unnecessary violence is fear of the other. Merton writes in his essay "The Root of War is Fear": "If you love peace, then hate injustice, hate tyranny, hate greed – but hate these things in *yourself*, not in another" (*PP* 19). Why is this simple mes-

sage so difficult to put into practice? I believe it is going to be an impossible task for humans to live in peace if we are not “wide open to heaven and earth.” Only a daily spiritual practice of dying and resurrecting can bring a total renewal to the whole self and society. We cannot expect to love others unless we love our enemies. In a letter Merton wrote to Dorothy Day, the Trappist monk tells her:

To restore communication, to see our oneness of nature with him, and to respect his personal rights and his integrity, his worthiness of love, we have to see ourselves as similarly accused along with him, condemned to death along with him, sinking to the abyss with him, and needing, with him, the ineffable gift of grace and mercy to be saved. Then, instead of pushing him down, trying to climb out by using his head as a stepping-stone for ourselves, we help ourselves to rise by helping him to rise. For when we extend our hand to the enemy who is sinking in the abyss, God reaches out to both of us, for it is He first of all who extends our hand to the enemy. It is He who “saves himself” in the enemy, who makes use of us to recover the lost groat which is His image in our enemy (*HGL* 141).

Loving one’s enemy is the highest spiritual act that one can perform. Merton did realize that his enemy is also a child of God. By punishing the enemy we cannot restore his or her spark of light within. The only solution is love. It takes time for both the oppressor and the oppressed to heal their soul. Both King and Merton knew that nonviolence is central to Christianity because every single creature, no matter how evil he or she becomes, is still created in the image and likeness of God (*imago dei*). Thus the only way for both the oppressor and the oppressed to return to the source of life is through the daily practice of love. Both need to let go of their hatred and suffering, and yet they both need to be open and receptive to the light and love from within and around them so that true healing can be effective. That is why redemptive love is such an important ingredient in the nonviolent philosophies of King and Merton.

#### 4. *The Spiritual Legacies of King and Merton*

King and Merton integrated in their lives and thoughts the active life and the contemplative life in different ways. Even though they were mystics in action, King and Merton chose different paths towards building the kingdom of heaven on earth. Their mystical visions led them to a holistic view of themselves with regards to the human notion of the self and their place in the universe. By responding to their inner calling they were able to partake in the divine life in building the kingdom of God here on earth. As Merton rightly points out, “The whole world faces a momentous choice. Either our frenzy of desperation will lead to destruction, or our loyalty to truth, to God and to our fellow man will enable us to perform the patient, heroic task of building a world that will eventually thrive in unity, order and peace” (*PPCE* 132).

King, like Merton, planted the seeds of love and nonviolence all over the world. By “seeds” I mean that mystical power within us which quickens the higher life in the soul. King’s and Merton’s prophetic message of love and nonviolence is universal in scope. It is a real message of everlasting peace, justice, and love. Their impact in today’s world is even greater than ever before since more people know about their prophetic and spiritual legacies.

It would not be an exaggeration to say that their greatest legacy is that both King and Merton sacrificed their lives for a greater cause than themselves. They both shared a common purpose, since their mystical visions inform and shape their prophetic voices. King and Merton saw themselves as co-partakers in building the kingdom of heaven on earth. Additionally, they both understood that God needs us as much as we need God in the ongoing process of inner conversion and outer transformation of the self



and the whole world. Consequently King and Merton acted on behalf of God by becoming instruments of God's plan for a new creation. Their ultimate goal was the creation of a new heaven and a new earth where the beloved community becomes a reality for all creatures. As Merton eloquently says,

The world was created without man, but the new creation which is the true Kingdom of God is to be the work of God in and through man. It is to be the great, mysterious, theandric work of the Mystical Christ, the New Adam, in whom all men as "one Person" or one "Son of God" will transfigure the cosmos and offer it resplendent to the Father. Here, in this transfiguration, will take place the apocalyptic marriage between God and His creation, the final and perfect consummation of which no mortal mysticism is able to dream and which is barely foreshadowed in the symbols and images of the last pages of the Apocalypse.<sup>12</sup>

Both King and Merton tried their best to bring together what is divided in our moral universe. For them, the creation of a new heaven and a new earth does not mean that the kingdom of God is absent from our lives right now. On the contrary, King and Merton recognized that we have access to the heavenly kingdom in the here and now since the Mystical Christ, or the Risen Christ, is already present in all creation. But God is calling men and women to work together in building more perfectly the kingdom of heaven on earth because this has not been fully accomplished. It is still a work in progress. Thus, humans must learn how to cooperate and must work very hard in order to bring the messianic kingdom of true justice, true peace, and true love into fruition. It is no wonder why King and Merton formed an alliance of conscience and became active members in the Fellowship of Reconciliation movement.

These two great men were able to articulate in refreshing ways the intimate relationship that exists between spirituality and social justice through their deeds and words. It is my personal hope that this study will serve as a reminder of how much can be accomplished when we are truly committed to build the beloved community and how much work is still ahead of us.

1. The correspondence between the Yungbluts and Merton, dated between May 7, 1967, and August 20, 1968, is found in the archives of the Thomas Merton Center, Bellarmine University, Louisville, Kentucky (hereafter TMC). I give thanks to the Director of the Center, Paul Pearson, for his help and hospitality in researching this material at the Center.
2. Thomas Merton, *The Hidden Ground of Love: Letters on Religious Experience and Social Concerns*, ed. William H. Shannon (New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 1985) 640; subsequent references will be cited as "HGL" parenthetically in the text.
3. June J. Yungblut to Merton, July 2, 1968 (TMC). In this same letter she told Merton that she was worried about the life of their mutual friend, Thich Nhat Hanh: "I wonder how much longer we can keep him on this earth."
4. June J. Yungblut to Merton, April 6, 1968 (TMC).
5. Martin Luther King, Jr., *A Testament of Hope: The Essential Writings and Speeches of Martin Luther King, Jr.*, ed. James Melvin Washington (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1991) 509; subsequent references will be cited as "King" parenthetically in the text.
6. Thomas Merton, *Peace in the Post-Christian Era*, ed. Patricia A. Burton (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2004) 29; subsequent references will be cited as "PPCE" parenthetically in the text.
7. William Johnston, *The Inner Eye of Love: Mysticism and Religion* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1982) 11; Johnston further says, "mysticism overflows into activity" (25).
8. Thomas Merton, *Contemplative Prayer* (New York: Herder & Herder, 1969) 143.
9. Thomas Merton, *Passion for Peace: The Social Essays*, ed. William H. Shannon (New York: Crossroad, 1995) 148; subsequent references will be cited as "PP" parenthetically in the text.
10. Thomas Merton, *Conjectures of a Guilty Bystander* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1966) 96-97; subsequent references will be cited as "CGB" parenthetically in the text.
11. Martin Luther King, Jr., *Why We Can't Wait* (New York: Harper & Row, 1964) 87.
12. Thomas Merton, *Zen and the Birds of Appetite* (New York: New Directions, 1968) 132.