Thomas Merton and Spiritual Maturity

By **Jonathan Montaldo**

> At the same time I should like to emphasize that I have never built up a philosophy of my own or wished to establish a new school of thought. Perhaps the greatest thing I have learned is never to think for myself; I fully agree with André Gide that "*Toutes choses sont dites déjà*," and what I have sought is to understand what has been said, while taking no account of the "inferior philosophers." Holding with Heraclitus that the Word is common to all, and that Wisdom is to know the Will whereby all things are steered, I am convinced with Jeremias that the human cultures in all their apparent diversity are but the dialects of one and the same language of the spirit, that there is a "common universe of discourse" transcending the differences of tongues.
>
> Ananda Coomaraswamy[1]

On January 13, 1961, Thomas Merton wrote a letter to the widow of Ananda Coomaraswamy, the art historian and philosopher of the perennial tradition in the world's religions. As Merton voiced his understanding of her husband's vocation to Doña Luisa, he was consciously aligning his own vocation with that of Coomaraswamy. He was acknowledging his own desires to be a scholar and contemplative of humankind's original unity and his inner struggle, like Coomaraswamy's before him, to become a peacemaker. "First of all," Merton wrote to Doña Luisa,

> Ananda Coomaraswamy is in many ways to me a model: the model of one who has thoroughly and completely united in himself the spiritual tradition and attitudes of the Orient and of the Christian West, not excluding also something of Islam, I believe. This kind of comprehension is, it seems to me, quite obligatory for the contemplative of our day, at least if he is in any sense also a scholar. I believe that the only really valid thing that can be accomplished in the direction of world peace and unity at the moment is the preparation of the way by the formation of men who, isolated, perhaps not accepted or understood by any "movement," are able to unite in themselves and experience in their own lives all that is best and most true in the various great spiritual traditions. Such men can become as it were "sacraments" or signs of peace, at last. They can do much to open up the minds of their contemporaries to receive, in the future, new seeds of thought. Our task is one of very remote

Jonathan Montaldo

Jonathan Montaldo is a former president of the International Thomas Merton Society and former director of the Thomas Merton Center at Bellarmine University, Louisville, KY. He has edited numerous volumes of Merton's writings, including *Entering the Silence*, the second volume of Merton's complete journals, and (with Patrick Hart, OCSO) *The Intimate Merton: His Life from His Journals*.

> preparation, a kind of arduous and unthanked pioneering.
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> I certainly feel that I owe very much to AKC as his book *The Transformation of Nature in Art*, when I was doing my thesis on Blake years ago, was decisive in leading me to take the right turn in life and to set my feet upon the spiritual road, which led to the monastery and to the contemplative life.[2]

Later in the letter Merton became even more self-revealing:

> I do not want to badger you or impose on your kindness, and really what is important is not that I be able to "get information" or "borrow books" but rather that I may have the joy and the privilege of a living contact with you and thus with AKC and his world of thought. I cannot help but feel that his "world of thought" is also mine, and that in any other realm today I am purely and simply an exile. Forgive me then, all I really ask is an opportunity to feel myself a citizen of my true country. (*HGL* 127)

Four years after this letter declaring himself a trans-cultural citizen of Coomaraswamy's "world of thought," Merton read an article by the Iranian-born psychotherapist A. Reza Arasteh, who earned his doctorate in the United States and would publish his most important work on human identity development while teaching on the faculty of the Washington Medical School in the District of Columbia. Arasteh published an article, "Final Integration in the Adult Personality," in 1965 in the *American Journal of Psychoanalysis*.[3] Arasteh expanded this article into a book in the same year, but Merton would not read the book until three years later, in 1968. Arasteh's article alone impressed Merton enough for him to write a brief review for his Order's international magazine, *Collectanea Cisterciensia*, which ended with Merton declaring: "We are grateful for this excellent and suggestive study which establishes that the full integration of human personality is to be found not merely in 'sublimation' and adjustment to society, but at the end of an arduous and sacrificial path of spiritual seeking. The monastic ideal has always centered on this aspect of pilgrimage in search of light beyond and outside the ordinary framework of social and cultural forms."[4]

Merton began corresponding with Arasteh in 1965 and they exchanged books. Merton sent the psychotherapist *The Way of Chuang Tzu*[5] and received in turn Arasteh's study of Rumi, the Sufi poet and Islamic mystic entitled *Rumi the Persian: Rebirth into Creativity and Love* (January, 1965). *Rumi the Persian* was Arasteh's psychological case study of Rumi as one who, by following the Sufi path, had achieved a re-birth into a conscious inner state of unity with all beings. Extrapolating a universal process from Rumi's biography as based on Arasteh's reading of the literary accounts of Rumi's conscious inner experiences, Arasteh's presentation of final integration in the human personality not only dove-tailed with Merton's intellectual interests in the Sufi way but also resonated with what Merton had decades earlier realized was characteristic of his own conscious inner experiences. Long before his reading of Arasteh, Merton had identified his life's inner journey as a path of anxious search for an abiding consciousness of communion with all beings by way of realizing union with the Source of all beings. He had long sought a transformation of his personality that would transcend his personality as a product of American cultural norms and more generally of a Western education. He had long sought a path toward transcending his culturally conventional self as an imitative product

in order to realize his universal self as an original and creative person.

Arasteh's *Rumi the Persian* examines primary sources that include Rumi's *Mathnawi* in six volumes, "a work in which Rumi discusses the human situation and the art of man's rebirth" and the *Diwan-e-Shams*, a collection of twenty-five hundred odes "in which Rumi gradually liberated himself from his historical social self."[6] Although Rumi's inner evolution toward a breakthrough beyond his conventional self retained the best elements of his Islamic culture, Arasteh generalized that the potential goal of final integration into a trans-cultural consciousness is true of all human personality development regardless of culture, place or historical period. "[R]egardless of language, cultural and temporal differences," Arasteh asserts,

> all styles of life have adopted the same goal of experiencing final integration, and moreover, the reality behind the ways they have adopted [to reach final integration] is similar in all. The name makes no difference; it is the experience which is the same. The common denominator, the process of break-through, comes [out of] the inner experience of life. This is essential for its result, not its process. The process of break-through results in "certainty," in positivity and a mature attitude. It is also synthesized in a state of receptivity known as "no-knowledge" in Taoism, "emptiness" in Zen Buddhism, "nothingness" and "poverty" in Sufism, and "the void" in the writings of Al-Ghazzali.[7]

Having read Arasteh's book on Rumi in 1965, Merton would not read Arasteh's book *Final Integration in the Adult Personality* until 1968, but when Merton finally read it, he would recognize that he had already been deeply affected by Arasteh's book on Rumi and had identified the goal of his own inner experiences as a final integration of his personality which Merton, thoroughly a monk of the Christian path, characterized as a rebirth into the New Man.

When Merton was corresponding with Doña Luisa Coomaraswamy in 1961, he told her he was reading many secondary sources concerning the Sufi path and the perennial philosophical tradition. To this admission, Doña Luisa had struck back with an admonishment: "always the sources, not the sorcerers."[8] In that spirit I want to quote expansively from an important section of Arasteh's book on *Rumi the Persian* which reveals how nuanced Arasteh's insights are as he delineates the universal process toward final integration. This section also warns that, while the goal of final integration is potentially accessible to everyone, the process is always an arduous inner journey that disorients a person's conventional securities. The goal of final integration is at once alluring and yet not easily accessible, since to be an integrated person one must experience continuous disintegration of one's deeply constructed personality. Arasteh writes:

> To become a fully integrated personality means to complete the circle of existence. From conception the individual passes through birth, socialization, enculturation, specialization, an awareness of his ego, objectivization of the ego, realization of the role of culture, perception of creation, perception of man in cosmic evolution, the unfolding of unconsciousness and finally the attainment of a state of conscious existence. One who desires to become a mature man must be born again and again and experience numerous spiritual rebirths [through a "succession of identities"].
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> At one stage of his growth the individual becomes aware of his conventional

> self, a process which requires years of preparation, experience and interaction with others, and with the environment. His ego then develops, but he must still gain insight into the growth of his ego. In turn, he must assimilate culture so completely that he becomes its representative, for one can only objectify culture after one has first absorbed it. The individual is born again when he realizes that history and a conventional life constitute only a short span of man's evolution. Man was evolving a million years before Adam. By gaining insight into the utilitarian role of culture and the ego, the individual perceives the cosmic self, perhaps through his conscience, specifically his inner voice. At this point he perceives the distance between his conventional and real self.
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> Perception alone [of this distance between who one is and who one longs to be] is inadequate. Indeed, [awareness only] indicates the initial conflict with the conventional self. So complicated is the nature of this conflict and so closely are its threads interwoven with the individual's personality that it requires great courage to face it, and even more to deal with it and to conquer it. To become mature, the individual must strive to develop sufficient strength to stand up against the conventional self, to acquire the mental fortitude to resist undesirable social forces, and to set a new standard free of all that is usually held dear. He must strengthen the source of his interest, direct it toward this new object of desire, concentrate on it, love it and continually act to expand it, until he becomes aware of it and unveils his own psychic capacity. Then, having achieved a state of conscious existence, he is fully born and completely aware. Thus, from his original awareness the individual has finally attained conscious existence and closed the circle of existence. (Arasteh, *Rumi* 25-26)

So far, so enticing is the goal of inner evolution, but Arasteh acknowledges that while all are called, few can endure the unavoidable crises on the journey toward the personality's final integration:

> In psychoanalytic terms both Erich Fromm and C. G. Jung have explained how conventional life and conformity may bar man from realizing his cosmic self or fully developing his personality [Fromm's *Man for Himself*[9] and Jung's *The Development of Personality*[10]]. The unconscious strivings of ordinary life often hinder a person at a time when he ought to show improvement. Undesirable social forces may lead him to perceive false values, in turn cultivating false interests. He is turned away from his real self and deprived of growth (the process of rebirth). Such a "half-born" man usually strives for and grasps what is close to him even though it impedes his development. Dominated by immediate needs and the voice of his super ego he fails to listen to his humanistic conscience or to his inner voice.
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> In such a situation fiction becomes real and falsity appears as truth. What the individual calls personality is that which shadows his potential personality and deprives him of maturing. That which he calls self is really that which veils his self, and what to him is "I" is only a barrier to his becoming "I".
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> In every age the mass of people betray themselves and remain blind imitators;

> only a handful of men follow their humanistic conscience at the right time and develop their selves to the fullest potentiality. These people often courageously begin this process with the step of isolation, which requires detachment from that most comforting means – the sense of belonging to a group of people, or more precisely, having a group reference. To take such a step [of isolating oneself] necessitates considerable sacrifice; it means cutting off all ties of position, rank and name, at a time when an individual still needs them; instead he strives only in the hope of finding his universal self. (Arasteh, *Rumi* 26-28)

When Merton read *Rumi the Persian* in 1965, one imagines that he surely must have recognized the pattern of his own inner experiences through his successive identities as an emotionally orphaned adolescent, as a young poet and novelist of twenty-three converting to Catholicism, and then most decidedly as a monk of Gethsemani Abbey from the age of twenty-six until his death in 1968 at the age of fifty-three. He must surely have recognized his inner experiences as undulating with the wave-length of Arasteh's insights into the evolution of personality. He must surely have sensed that he was also a citizen not only of Coomaraswamy's but of Arasteh's "world of thought." In fact, had Arasteh read Merton's *New Seeds of Contemplation*,[11] he might have been tempted to include Merton as another case study of one who was breaking through toward a final integration of his personality as a universal self. For Merton had written in *New Seeds* that

> The only true joy on earth is to escape from the prison of our own false self, and enter by love into union with the Life Who dwells and sings within the essence of every creature and in the core of our own souls. In His love we possess all things and enjoy fruition of them, finding Him in them all. And thus as we go about the world, everything we meet and everything we see and hear and touch, far from defiling, purifies us and plants in us something more of contemplation and of heaven. (*NSC* 25)

Further on in *New Seeds* Merton's writing sings of his consciousness of the goal of final integration on perfect pitch: "Love is my true identity," Merton wrote. "Selflessness is my true self. Love is my true character. Love is my name" (*NSC* 60).

In a new preface Arasteh had written for the 1975 paperback edition of his book *Final Integration* he defined his understanding of final personality integration as an "experience of inner evolution which begins with existential moratorium, which leads to anxiety, detachment from social reality, intentional isolation, and finally the attainment of a state of 'void' and 'rebirth in totality.'"[12] I want to parse Arasteh's definition by briefly noting some phenomena of Merton's biography that allow us to intuit that Merton's inner experiences had always undulated with the pattern of Arasteh's stages of development toward final personality integration.

In his preface to the 1975 paperback edition of *Final Integration*, Arasteh writes:

> My concept of the succession of identities, and the transitional periods in life for further growth, goes beyond existing theories. I introduce "existential moratorium" as a searching period for the birth of the total man and an understanding of final

> personality integration as
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> - An experience of inner evolution
> - which begins with existential moratorium
> - which leads to anxiety,
> - detachment from social reality,
> - intentional isolation and finally,
> - the attainment of a state of "void" and rebirth in totality . . . .
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> In this rebirth, in the process of living one externally creates "forms," if he so desires, and internally attains happiness without drugs. It is a universal state regardless of time, place, or culture. It is characterized by certainty, and the search for truth and satisfaction, which are the final manifestations of the drive for preservation, activity, and sex, all rooted in a mother-atom, root of being or the unknown "simple essence." . . . The concept of intentional isolation, developed in *Final Integration*, stimulated the late Thomas Merton to explore the historical contribution of monasteries in assisting sensitive men to reexamine their assumptions about life. (Arasteh, *Final Integration* [2] xv)

"Final personality integration" is:

- **An experience of inner evolution:** the stress here is on inner development. The evolution of personality does not absolutely evolve the need to go "somewhere else" than where one already is, to abandon for example, one's Protestant Christian formation and become a Tibetan monk. Merton wrote a circular letter to his friends from Asia shortly before his death there and reminded them in a tone that connotes a final pronouncement: "Our real journey in life is interior: it is a matter of growth, deepening, and of an ever greater surrender to the creative action of love and grace in our hearts."[13]
- **which begins with [an] existential moratorium:** Arasteh defines existential moratorium as a dynamic process that begins with detachment from a previous state, followed by quest, anxiety, a vague awareness of the new state; an increase of anxiety and love for that state, effort, devotion, trust and hope. One can frame Merton's autobiography, *The Seven Storey Mountain*,[14] and especially his private journals, through the lens of a process of detachment and re-attachment, or what Arasteh and Sufi teaching call the process of the conventional ego's disintegration and reintegration.
- **which leads to anxiety:** an anxious searching and intellectual restlessness is a continuing sub-text in Merton's most confessional writing. Some of this anxiety might be called neurotic, but Arasteh's theories are helpful in our re-framing Merton's anxiety through repeated inner crises as a positive energy that moves Merton always forward, beyond any complacencies or stopping to be content with his past achievements or achieved status, so as to seek the fulfillment of his life as his true self becoming one with Love.
- **which leads to detachment from social reality:** Merton in his writing is always distancing himself – identifying himself as a "stranger" – from the values enforced by the conventions of Western culture, to include the institutionalized American version of conventional nineteenth-century monastic routines at the Abbey of Gethsemani.

- **which leads to intentional isolation:** Merton's entrance into monastic life, his continuing search for more solitude, his voluntarily taking up the challenge of living as a hermit, his self-identification of his self as that of an "exile," as always "a marginal person" and as a citizen of that true country which is nowhere because it is everywhere witnesses to the role of intentional isolation and solitude as an inner mechanism for increasing spiritual maturity in Merton's inner biography.
- **and which finally leads to the attainment of a state of "void" and rebirth in totality:** no one can know if Merton's inner experiences consistently attained this finally integrated state, but his continuing creativity, which was outsourced by his realization that Love was his "true identity" and his "name," certainly reflects a continual desire to integrate his inner experiences in a realization of final communion with the All that is. The question could be asked if Merton ever conceived that there was truly a finality in this interior process of rebirth into creativity and Love. For Merton had imbibed deeply of the teachings of Gregory of Nyssa and had incorporated Gregory's notion of *epectasis* for his own life, *epectasis* being a Greek word that literally means always stretching forward toward the prize in Christ Jesus (the word *epectasis* is straight out of Paul's Epistle to the Philippians, chapter 3), so that becoming Love for Merton, as it was for Gregory, is realized to be an endless process that continues up to and beyond a human being's death.[15]

Admitting that all of the above is only a sketch, we turn with regrettable speed to three articles Merton had written in 1968, during that final year of his life, which were directly influenced or nuanced by what Merton called his "close and fruitful reading" in that same year of Arasteh's *Final Integration in the Adult Personality.*

In a letter dated March 22, 1968, Merton wrote Arasteh to tell him he had written a review article of his book on final integration that would be published first in *Monastic Studies* and would have its last incarnation, with the title "Final Integration: Toward a 'Monastic Therapy,'" in the posthumous collection *Contemplation in a World of Action*.[16] With this same letter to Arasteh announcing his review article of Arasteh's book, Merton had enclosed a copy of another article, "Rebirth and the New Man in Christianity,"[17] which he had revised in the spring of 1968 (the last spring of his life). Merton assured Arasteh that this article on rebirth in Christianity would prove that he was already in his own words "in complete agreement" with Arasteh's notion of final integration and it would give Arasteh "some introduction to the idea of rebirth which is so important in Christianity" (*HGL* 42).

Merton's article "Rebirth and the New Man in Christianity" is a radical document in many ways, not the least of which is Merton's assertion that the genuine fruit of Christian inner experience is a liberty of spirit that transcends, while not necessarily abandoning completely, all culturally Christian forms. Merton's articulation of the final goal of Christian experience is explosive for a Roman Catholic priest and monk of his times and remains so for our own. "In the theology of the New Testament," Merton writes,

> particularly that of Paul and John, the "new being" of the Christian, his "new creation," is the effect of an inner revolution which, in its ultimate and most radical significance, implies complete self-transcendence and transcendence of the norms and attitudes of any given culture, any merely human society. This includes transcendence even of religious practices. The whole sense of Paul's

> polemic with Judaism, a theology of grace which (through Augustine and Luther) has had a decisive effect in shaping Western culture, lies in his contention that the Christian who has attained a radical experience of liberty "in the Spirit" is no longer "under the law." He is henceforth superior to the laws and norms of any religious society, since he is bound by the higher law of love, which is his freedom itself, directed not merely to the fulfillment of his own will but rather to the transcendent and mysterious purposes of the Spirit: i.e., the good of all men. For all men are now seen as created, redeemed, and loved by God, and all are "one in Christ" in the sense that all are known to God as One Man, the universal Man, Christ, the Son of God. The theological implications of this are, of course, extremely subtle and complex. . . . There is in the depths of man's heart a voice which says: "You must be born again." It is the obscure but insistent demand of his own nature to transcend itself in the freedom of a fully integrated, autonomous, personal identity. (*L&L* 193-94)
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> The deepest spiritual instinct in man is that urge of inner truth which demands that he be faithful to himself: to his deepest and most original potentialities. Yet at the same time, in order to become oneself, one must die. That is to say, in order to become one's true self, the false self must die. In order for the inner self to appear, the outer self must disappear: or at least become secondary, unimportant. (*L&L* 196)

"At this point we must observe that the rebirth of which Christ speaks is not a single event but a continuous dynamic of inner renewal. . . . The true Christian rebirth is," Merton asserts,

> a renewed transformation, a "passover" in which man is progressively liberated from selfishness and not only grows in love but in some sense "becomes love." The perfection of the new birth is reached where there is no more selfishness, there is only love. In the language of the mystics, there is no more ego-self, there is only Christ; self no longer acts, only the Spirit acts in pure love. The perfect illumination is, then, the illumination of Love shining by itself. To become completely transparent and allow Love to shine by itself is the maturity of the "New Man." (*L&L* 199)

This is a mystical reading of the texts of Paul and John that points to the radical and narrow path to complete integration afforded by a complete adherence to the Christian way. Merton is at his best here – as elsewhere – as courageously he expounds the arduous process ahead for those who would identify their minds with the "mind of Christ." But what is the essential inner mechanism that must accompany this process of becoming a "completely transparent" person through whom Love shines by itself? This inner movement toward spiritual maturity must be accompanied by what Merton called a "discipline of the heart" as one proceeds on an anxious path of searching to unite with a perceived object of desire that becomes no longer an object but a subjective inner experience of one's true self as a dynamic process of becoming Love. Becoming one with Love loving is the goal of final integration. In Arasteh's words, instead of knowing "I think, therefore I am," the creatively realized person knows, "I love, therefore I am" (Arasteh, *Final Integration* [2] xiv).

Merton's second essay of 1968 nuanced by his reading of Arasteh is entitled "Renewal and Discipline" (*CWA* 98-116), which is a more complete exposé of this "discipline of the heart" that must accompany a person's struggle to unleash ego-attachments to passions and to come out of safe hiding places in which the cultural self takes refuge against the inner voice that calls the cultural self to creativity beyond limited and secure boundaries. Merton in this article theologizes Arasteh's process of final integration, since he characterizes "discipline of the heart" as being underwritten by the Holy Spirit. In Merton's inner experiences it is supernatural gifts, such as courage, joy, perseverance and wisdom on the path out of ignorance of one's true self, that support a person in enduring the solitude and anguish accompanying the disintegration of the psycho-cultural self so as to experience reintegration into what Arasteh calls the psycho-cosmological self. The continuing disintegration of the personality formed by the cultural super-ego requires such a consciously applied "discipline of the heart" since a person must pass a narrow gate of darkness and real, although in the end salvific, suffering. "Growth in experience," Merton writes,

> implies a serious self-doubt and self-questioning in which values previously held seem to be completely exploded and no other tangible values come to take their place. This may even take the form of a crisis of religious faith in which our whole conception of God and of our relationship to Him may be turned upside down. There may seem to be "no God" at all, or else our relationship to Him may seem so desperate that we feel as through we are damned, in our moments of darkness. This, as St. John of the Cross shows, marks the beginning of a whole new experience of faith on a completely different level. The passage from a stage in which one loves and worships God as a beautiful object of desire to a stage in which God ceases to be an object and loses all definite limitations in our mind is something which cannot be easily described: but it is a perilous, though necessary, experience. Discipline prepares us for this. But the passage itself is not a matter of discipline. It is brought about "mystically" by the secret action of God in a way of which we cannot be fully conscious. (*CWA* 111-12)

"What has to be rediscovered," Merton continues, "is the inner discipline of 'the heart,' that is to say, of the 'whole man' – a discipline that reaches down into his inmost ground and opens out to the invisible, intangible, but nevertheless mysteriously sensible reality of God's presence, of His love, and of His activity in our hearts" (*CWA* 113).

> [B]asically, the discipline involved here is that of a crucifixion which eliminates a superficial and selfish kind of experience and opens to us the freedom of a life that is not dominated by egoism, vanity, wilfullness, passion, aggressiveness, jealousy, greed. Finally, discipline means solitude of some sort, not in the sense of selfish withdrawal but in the sense of an emptiness that no longer cherishes the comfort of various social "idols" and is not slavishly dependent on the approval of others. In such solitude one learns not to seek love but to *give* it. One's great need is now no longer to *be* loved, understood, accepted, pardoned, but to understand, to love, to pardon and accept others just as they are, in order to help them transcend themselves in love. Anyone who undertakes to be a monk knows, by the very

> fact of his vocation, that he is summoned by God to a difficult, lifelong work, in which there will always be anguish and great risk. If he evades this work, under any pretext whatever (even under the pretext of conforming to an exterior ritual or ascetic observance which does not really suit his inner needs), he must know that he cannot have any peace with himself or with God because he is trying to silence the deepest imperative of his own heart. (*CWA* 114-15)

The third Merton essay of 1968, "Final Integration: Toward a 'Monastic Therapy'" (*CWA* 205-17) is his review-article on Arasteh's book. In this essay Merton explicitly defines the goal of Christian monastic and contemplative living as "a full spiritual development and a supernatural, even charismatic, maturity" (*CWA* 211). While Merton intuitively agreed with Arasteh's psychodynamic theories, he once again framed the process toward "final integration" as a theological experience instigated and then supported by supernatural graces. "Final integration," Merton writes,

> is a state of transcultural maturity far beyond mere social adjustment, which always implies partiality and compromise. The man who is "fully born" has an entirely "inner experience of life." He apprehends his life fully and wholly from an inner ground that is at once more universal than the empirical ego and yet entirely his own. He is in a certain sense "cosmic" and "universal man." He has attained a deeper, fuller identity than that of his limited ego-self which is only a fragment of his being. He is in a certain sense identified with everybody: or in the familiar language of the New Testament (which Arasteh evidently has not studied) he is "all things to all men." He is able to experience their joys and sufferings as his own, without however becoming dominated by them. He has attained to a deep inner freedom – the Freedom of the Spirit we read of in the New Testament. He is guided not just by will and reason, but by "spontaneous behavior subject to dynamic insight." Now, this calls to mind the theology of St. Thomas on the Gifts of the Holy Spirit which move a man to act "in a superhuman mode." Through Dr. Arasteh takes no account of specifically supernatural agencies, it is clear that such considerations might become relevant here. But of course they cannot be investigated by experimental science. (*CWA* 211)

Further on in the essay, Merton made explicit his intuitive equation of final integration and peace-making:

> The man who has attained final integration is no longer limited by the culture in which he has grown up. "He has embraced *all* of *life*. . . . He has experienced qualities of every type of life": ordinary human existence, intellectual life, artistic creation, human love, religious life. He passes beyond all these limiting forms, while retaining all that is best and most universal in them, "finally giving birth to a fully comprehensive self." He accepts not only his own community, his own society, his own friends, his own culture, but all mankind. He does not remain bound to one limited set of values in such a way that he opposes them aggressively or defensively to others. He is fully "Catholic" in the best sense of the word. He

> has a unified vision and experience of the one truth shining out in all its various manifestations, some clearer than others, some more definite and more certain than others. He does not set these partial views up in opposition to each other, but unifies them in a dialectic or an insight of complementarity. With this view of life he is able to bring perspective, liberty and spontaneity into the lives of others. The finally integrated man is a peacemaker, and that is why there is such a desperate need for our leaders to become such men of insight. (*CWA* 212)

At least three interpreters of Merton's biography and his literary legacy have already laid down the track which would allow a reader to frame Merton's inner biography through the perspective of Reza Arasteh's theories on final personality integration. Elena Malits' book, *The Solitary Explorer*[18] and Anthony Padovano's characterization of Merton as a universal person in his book *The Human Journey*[19] are now out of print but remain marvelously insightful of the dynamic progress of Merton's inner experiences toward final integration. (Both books should be republished for the centennial of Merton's birth in 2015.) The third Merton interpreter, David D. Cooper, deserves special recognition. First published in 1989 (and reprinted in paperback in 2008), Cooper's *Thomas Merton's Art of Denial: The Evolution of a Radical Humanist*[20] emphasized the importance of Merton's reading of Arasteh as witnessed by Merton's review-essay "Final Integration: Toward a 'Monastic Therapy.'" I had already completed my discussion of this essay when I went back on a providential whim to consult Cooper's work. It is beyond doubting that Cooper's book has influenced, twenty years later, the thrust of this essay. Although I am studying Arasteh's work and the essays of the last years of Merton's life to better understand the duress of my own inner experiences of ego-disintegration, without my referencing Cooper's work I would be unconsciously but directly plagiarizing two of his general ideas about Arasteh's influence on Merton. Cooper wrote that it is "as if Merton had discovered through Arasteh's typology a new reading of his personal history" (Cooper 182). Further on Cooper wrote, "Merton was drawn to Arasteh's theory of final integration in the adult personality because it confirmed, authenticated, and legitimized his own experience of growth through personal crisis" (Cooper 183). Cooper, however, does not analyze Arasteh's psychodynamic theories nor does he produce a reading of the specifics of Merton's personal inner history through the lens of Arasteh's typology. His thesis of Merton's becoming a "radical humanist" was not well received by some reviewers back in 1989. They judged Cooper's thesis of Merton becoming a radical humanist as insensitive to the continuing infrastructure of Christ-centered monastic and contemplative prayer in Merton's interior biography up to the day of his death. But now, with Merton's private journals having been published in full, Cooper's interpretation of Merton as a radical humanist deserves new attention and perhaps a new book that frames Merton's entire biography as a case study of final human integration assisted by Arasteh's typology, rather than, as Cooper does, confining Arasteh's influence on Merton's inner journey only through the mid-1960s.

The thrust of the developmental process of Thomas Merton's inner experiences does indeed correspond to that of Reza Arasteh's typology of inner experience that potentially results in a finally integrated person who becomes, as Arasteh wrote, "a real self, a thoroughly-born man, a perfect and universal man . . . [united] with all, becoming God-like, or being only the truth. To become like God means the assimilation of what God represents, that is, representing a beautiful creation rather

than submission to an authoritarian image of God: it means 'becoming love and loving to save, not loving God to be saved'" (Arasteh, *Final Integration* [1] 157-58).

Setting aside the sorcerers, I invite you to read Arasteh for yourselves and ascertain, if you are a dedicated Merton reader, if he opens up perspectives for better understanding Merton's spiritual biography. Through Arasteh's theories on human identity, we might more deeply fathom what made Merton tick and what makes him still tick for his readers. We might more profoundly understand how a gifted teacher's "inner work" expresses itself in writing. Furthermore, we might better appreciate the equation between a process of human personality development toward integration and the process of becoming peacemakers, since, in the end, the most effective peacemaker is one who has become integrally resonant with the divergent but complementary forces in her own consciousness to a degree that allows her to identify and understand the divergent but complementary forces within the world community of persons, all of whom are on a common journey toward a final integration.

In my reading of Merton I sense that one of the deepest imperatives of his inner life was to become a productive citizen of a "world of thought" which brings all that at first glance seems strange into a dynamic relationship of familiarity. The goal of Merton's conscious desires was toward becoming cosmopolitan: his true home where his true self was most welcomed was at once nowhere and everywhere.[21] His writing, even at its most personal and confessional, always dialogued with the world at large. His interior dialogues with his true self, when he was silent, resulted in the epiphanies of his inner voice into the marketplace of ideas beyond the conventional stereotypes of Roman Catholic priest and monk, beyond any rigid boundaries and a conventional religiosity. While Merton is a first-rate writer only occasionally, his artful rendering of the imperatives of his heart to be a person of creativity and love at the service of the world's community of persons could explain his continuing relevance for those whose inner experiences are guiding them to seek the same goal. I would not argue before even the friendliest of courts that Thomas Merton died a fully integrated personality – this is beyond my capacity to know. But I might well win a debate based on a close and fruitful reading of his words that Thomas Merton was a peacemaker and an integrated person in the making. He is another stand-out personality within that huge cloud of other witnesses like him who articulate by their creative actions in the world an original consciousness of a universal reality, that each human heart longs for communion with all things and that above all contrarian forces Love remains every human heart's true name.[22]

1. After-dinner speech on the occasion of Coomaraswamy's seventieth birthday (1947).
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) 126; subsequent references will be cited as "*HGL*" parenthetically in the text.
3. A. Reza Arasteh, "Final Integration in the Adult Personality," *American Journal of Psychoanalysis* 25 (1965) 61-73.
4. Original English version as found in Patricia A. Burton. "Final Integration of a Bibliographical Puzzle," *The Merton Seasonal* 35:4 (Winter 2010) 30; the review was published in French translation in *Collectanea Cisterciensa* 29.1 (1967) 179-80. Burton's article provides a very helpful chronology and discussion of Merton's reading of and response to Arasteh and his work.
5. Thomas Merton, *The Way of Chuang Tzu* (New York: New Directions, 1965).
6. A. Reza Arasteh, *Rumi the Persian: Rebirth into Creativity and Love*, Preface by Erich Fromm (Lahore: Muhammed Ashraf, 1965) xix-xx; subsequent references will be cited as "Arasteh, *Rumi*" parenthetically in the text.
7. A. Reza Arasteh, *Final Integration in the Adult Personality: A Measure for Health, Social Change and Leadership*

(Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1965) 374; subsequent references to this edition will be cited as "Arasteh, *Final Integration* [1]" parenthetically in the text.

8. Doña Luisa Coomaraswamy to Thomas Merton, Feb. 18, 1961 (Thomas Merton Center archives, Bellarmine University, Louisville, KY), quoted in Rob Baker, "Merton, Marco Pallis, and the Traditionalists," in Rob Baker and Gray Henry eds., *Merton and Sufism: The Untold Story* (Louisville, KY: Fons Vitae, 1999) 229.
9. Erich Fromm, *Man for Himself: An Inquiry into the Psychology of Ethics* (New York: Rinehart, 1947).
10. C. G. Jung, *The Development of Personality*, trans. R. F. C. Hull (New York: Pantheon, 1954).
11. Thomas Merton, *New Seeds of Contemplation* (New York: New Directions, 1961); subsequent references will be cited as "*NSC*" parenthetically in the text.
12. A. Reza Arasteh. *Toward Final Personality Integration: A Measure for Health, Social Change and Leadership*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge, MA: Schenkman, 1975) xv; subsequent references to this edition will be cited as "Arasteh, *Final Integration* [2]" parenthetically in the text.
13. Thomas Merton, *The Asian Journal*, ed. Naomi Burton Stone, Brother Patrick Hart and James Laughlin (New York: New Directions, 1973) 296.
14. Thomas Merton, *The Seven Storey Mountain* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1948).
15. See Thomas Merton, *An Introduction to Christian Mysticism: Initiation into the Monastic Tradition* 3, ed. Patrick F. O'Connell (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 2008) 82.
16. Thomas Merton, *Contemplation in a World of Action* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1971) 205-17; subsequent references will be cited as "*CWA*" parenthetically in the text. The article originally appeared in *Monastic Studies* 6 (1968) 87-99.
17. Thomas Merton, *Love and Living*, ed. Naomi Burton Stone and Brother Patrick Hart (New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 1979) 192-202; subsequent references will be cited as "*L&L*" parenthetically in the text.
18. Elena Malits, *The Solitary Explorer: Thomas Merton's Transforming Journey* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1980).
19. Anthony T. Padovano, *The Human Journey: Thomas Merton, Symbol of a Century* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1982).
20. David D. Cooper, *Thomas Merton's Art of Denial: The Evolution of a Radical Humanist* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1989) 182; subsequent references will be cited as "Cooper" parenthetically in the text.
21. See Erich Fromm, D. T. Suzuki and Richard De Martino, *Zen Buddhism and Psychoanalysis* (New York: Harper, 1960) 105.
22. An earlier version of this article was presented at the Canadian Memorial Church & Centre for Peace, Vancouver, BC in March, 2011.