

Merton, Niebuhr and the Significance of Mercy for Urban Ministry Practices

By **Barry K. Morris**

Introduction

Mercy feels like an elusive theme to articulate. Mercy may well be felt and expressed as a primordial reality – something that seems to spontaneously arise (and/or descend) when one is moved to declare without perhaps any prior thought: “Lord have mercy” or simply: “mercy, mercy.”¹ Mercy may be our best attempt to grasp and express the nature of God’s own Being; such a nature otherwise being conceptually “beyond, behind, and above the passing flux of things.”² Thankfully, there is a creative remnant who have written, sung, preached of and prayed or meditated with the subject of mercy. Thomas Merton and Reinhold Niebuhr are two helpful resources who are worthy to mine (not to mention their able students and/or interpreters). As it is one task of this reflection to state some of their remarks – especially via their sermons and prayers – it is another challenge to intimate the implications of mercy for actual urban ministry practices. It is still a final challenge to press with this spiritual/theological term for times when the practices of ministry in the city really fail or remain “unsuccessful” because in the presence of evil, no matter its many guises, the possibilities of a purposeful, flourishing life together are reduced, starved and/or thwarted.³

While the theme of mercy can defy a complete articulation, we are not without resources. Think of doxologies that summarize the very nature of God in sovereign yet intimate expressions as: “Holy, Holy, Holy, Merciful and Mighty / God in Three Persons, Blessed Trinity.” Think of hymns like Frederick Faber’s “There’s a wideness in God’s Mercy”; Ruth Duck’s “Wash, O God, our Sons and Daughters”; or Joseph Addison’s “When All Your Mercies, O My God.” Think of poem-songs like William Blake’s “To Mercy, Pity, Peace, and Love” and its second verse: “For Mercy has a human heart, / Pity a human face / and Love, the human form divine, / and Peace, the human dress.”⁴ Think of prayers which ground themselves in an appeal to and evocation of mercy as the ground for daring to hope beyond intense and prolonged despair.⁵ Also, while there are bold theological articulations of the meanings of mercy, these are sensibly conveyed with the accompanying complement of mystery, so that one term illumines the meaning of the other term. Above all, for purposes of this reflection, there are parables and in turn preachers’ bold moves to profess ranges of meaning on mercy. To “test” such professions, there are in the practices of ministry human limits, sin in all of its guises, and the pressures of city living and even counter-living which combine to bear down on us to sustain (alas, also threaten) the practitioners and those sought to be served.⁶

First, we will briefly describe sermons by Merton and Niebuhr based on three of Jesus’ parables, all of which help to illustrate a range of meaning

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on mercy – including mercy in relationship to judgment in the execution of justice and mercy as understood via the execution of God’s grace in relationship to forgiveness and renewed life beyond.

Merton’s Parable Sermon as Window into the “Climate of Mercy”

Helpfully, Merton preached on the parable of the “Good Samaritan.”⁷ It serves to illustrate how the Samaritan is a window into the presence of what, in practice, mercy yearns to mean when applied to a concrete situation – as well as how the hidden Christ is discerned in the very presence of God-in-the-flesh and when suffering evokes the need for mercy. Merton notes that the other main actors in Jesus’ story (priest, levite and the questioning protagonist lawyer) serve as professional types. The lack of a compassionate response to a badly hurt and robbed traveler illumines that they “have other things to do than to be instruments of *chesed*” (SC 180). Such a key Hebrew word, Merton explicates, is a compassion that is also steadfast – an enduring fidelity – since it is carried out over more than a momentary stop on the roadside to give only temporary and immediate relief. This is depicted in the Samaritan’s thoughtful follow-through on several levels (tending to wounds, lodging, food and future compensation). Yet mercy is more than even mere compassion, even a steadfast compassion. Mercy is the “fountain” and “hidden source” of God’s love (SC 177) and thus a trustworthy clue to the nature of what loving the neighbor, and Christ within the neighbor, should mean.

Perhaps Merton’s most helpful interpretation via induction arises from his inquiry into the nature of the lawyer’s skilled but deflecting query which seeks to “classify” what being a “neighbor” means. Since “classifications are without significance” (SC 173) when a concrete situation summons a compassionate response – such a response arising from a contrast-awareness situation of being aroused due to being moved to suffer with another – it seems in the nature of mercy that it is practiced when it is already a part of having mercy shown to oneself.⁸ Merton continues, “For we do not and cannot love according to classifications” (SC 173), since *chesed* “knows no classification of good and evil, just or unjust” (SC 180).

Merton has succinctly written on mercy in such a sweeping phrase as “the climate of mercy.”⁹ Such a compact phrase expresses the very heart into and of the mystery of God’s grace. Therein, the power of God is compacted together in mercy for the sake of a reconciled humanity and with mercy being the very ground for human activities. Such discipling activities call upon Jesus’ followers to partake in and dare to practice a mercy, that once given an experience of mercy (by grace), knows no boundaries or premature limits to what loving aches to mean. There is unconditionality at work such that, again, convenient and self-serving justifications cannot work for long to protect or assist our inclinations to pass by a wounded person’s situation and therein, our mutual soulfulness. He concludes his sermon: “in answer to this movement of compassion a Presence is made on the earth . . . Perhaps the encounter is outwardly sordid and unattractive. But the Presence of God is brought about on earth there, and Christ is there, and God is in communion with man” (SC 182).

Reinhold Niebuhr combines two eschatological parables from the gospel of Matthew – aptly named “two parables about judgment”¹⁰ – to convey what justice comes to mean when, almost inevitably, judgment is administrated or executed. This is particularly expressed in the parable of the sheep and goats, when at the “last judgment” the nations (not merely individuals or local communities) are summoned for their eternal fate. The highlight of the parable is an element of surprise, especially when nations do not clearly know when and/or where they engaged – or, alas, disengaged – to meet the needs found in the stranger or the sick by befriending them, or found in the hungry or naked by feeding and clothing them, or found in the prisoners by visiting them. Inevitably, judgment is served to those not

responding to and engaging in such meeting of needs. As in Merton's rendering of the presence of Jesus the Christ in the merciful response of the mixed-blood and semi-heretical Samaritan – as well as in the actual wounds of the robbed and beaten traveler – judgment is served on the basis of responding, or not, to Christ in the concreteness of needs that are inexcusably near at hand, much akin to Dietrich Bonhoeffer's rendering of God as the “Beyond in our midst” or “The transcendent is . . . the neighbor who is in reach in any given situation, God in human form.”¹¹

Niebuhr's Parable about Judgment with Mercy

The second parable presents a vineyard owner and the hired laborers for the day. From dawn to mid-day to late afternoon, and to the last hour before dusk, each hired hand is given to believe that they would be given their due wage commensurate with the hours actually worked – akin to today's fair standard practices of “equal wages for equal work.” Alas, at the end of the day, each is given the same full day's wages, so that those having worked the earliest and the longest understandably (to the original hearers and via them, to us) are filled with resentment if not righteous indignation. But there is an operative mercy here such that Niebuhr exegetes that “The parable of the Vineyard pictures God as a generous master who pays his servants without regard for the length of their services, i.e., without consideration for exact degree of good or evil done in their lives . . . making no distinction between the first and the last” (R. Niebuhr, *Beyond Tragedy* 253). In short, whereas in the Parable of the Last Judgment differences do count (as key criteria for being judged), in this Parable of the Laborers and the Vineyard the differences are declared insignificant (R. Niebuhr, *Beyond Tragedy* 254). Here in effect, to retrieve a well-known hymn's title, “there is a wideness in God's mercy” at work.

What Niebuhr then induces and extrapolates from these two enticing parables is a theology of how it is that judgment and mercy are only possibly related and integrated in the mystery of what is operative in the Cross. He summarizes it as a move from the observation that the “evil and the good, and even the more or the less good are equally in need of the mercy of God” (R. Niebuhr, *Beyond Tragedy* 255); further, that “sharp distinction between the good and the evil in the word of judgment is transcended in the assurance of forgiveness to the evil in the ultimate promise of mercy” (R. Niebuhr, *Beyond Tragedy* 256). It is, again, in the Cross event – and virtually all bold endeavors to express a commendable account of what atonement means – that the mystery of how justice, as ending in judgment, and mercy, conveying a relentless and unconditional forgiveness, are combined and not only symbolically (unless perhaps one adopts the perspective that symbols are more than literal renderings of an event or a doctrine as they participate in the reality they seek to interpret and point beyond themselves).¹²

In his sermon “Power and Weakness of God,” worthy of elaboration, Niebuhr forcefully attests:

The Christ upon the cross is a point of illumination where the ultimate mercy is apprehended. It is not a mercy which cancels out the divine justice; nor does it prove the divine justice to be merely love. There is a hard and terrible facet to justice which stands in contradiction to love. . . . Justice is good and punishment is necessary. Yet justice alone does not move men to repentance. The inner core of rebellion is not touched until they behold the executioner of judgment suffering with and for the victim of punishment. This is the meaning of “atonement” as apprehended by faith . . . the unity of mercy and justice are expressed in . . . that “God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son.”¹³

Such a biblical tone and content have been virtually neglected by students, social ethicists and activists, who tend to draw from Niebuhr a robust social ethics rationale or at least his social justice insights, but risk throwing the “baby [theology] out with the bath-water.”

Prayerful Intimations in the Vocation of Mercy and Urban Ministry Implications¹⁴

It could be instructive to share a couple of prayers from Merton and Niebuhr that convey the presence of mercy – as well as to indicate how such prayers complement the sermons previously considered. They convey interpretative moves from the biblical texts to their sermons and on to possible applications of life-in-ministry. The move from the point of a text to the point of a sermon, and then to the point of these later intimations, is never smooth.¹⁵

In one sermon entitled “The Burden of Conscience,” Niebuhr concisely expresses the relationship of pity-as-mercy and that of the pathos of the human condition in a concluding prayer: “Give us grace, our Father, to measure the height of our dignity as free spirits, and the depth of our misery and the breadth of our responsibility. Judge us in our vanities and pretensions, Have pity on us, for *only your infinite pity is adequate to the infinite pathos of human existence*” (R. Niebuhr, *Justice & Mercy* 111 [emphasis added]). This prayer dovetails with Niebuhr’s sermon on judgment, referencing in the second clause an invitation so to judge our vainglories or exaggerated estimates, especially as he states so often elsewhere in human collectivities or societal groups (collective egoisms). It also balances this with the closing petitionary appeal to match and overcome our pathos with the pity or mercy of God’s gracious presence. There is an implication for city ministries and not merely in the inner or urban core areas. Pity in the form of compassion, or mercy itself, may arise or be revealed in the midst of ministers feeling their low moments or the empathetic pathos of the “slings and arrows of outrageous fortune” done to others (as sinned-against). Yet, when called upon to respond to the immediate needs or crises and to ask about the root causes and conditions for such a situation occurring, one may well wonder whether it need not occur again – that there could be a move from an initial moment of pity to social justice activity as in organizing a reduction if not elimination of robbery and assault for others traveling along such risk-filled roads.¹⁶

In one of Merton’s prayers found in the rather intimate public journal, *The Sign of Jonas*, he laments with an evocative appeal: “Lord God of this great night: do You see the woods? Do You hear the rumor of their loneliness? Do You behold their secrecy? Do You remember their solitudes? Do you see that my soul is beginning to dissolve like wax within me?” He biblically adds words from the psalm prayed by Jesus on the Cross: *Clamabo per diem et non exaudies, et nocte et non ad insipientiam mihi!* [“I cry out by day and you do not hear and by night and [it is] not foolish for me” (Ps. 22:2)] (*SJ* 360). Could this relate to a possible prayer of the robbed, forsaken traveler on the road? Could this perhaps represent a prayer from one of the passers-by, following their indifference or higher preoccupations, en route to their pending holy duties and thus needing to forsake any prior contamination and deterrence? Could an aspect of this prayer arise as enlightened eyes of the heart (Eph. 1:18)? Epiphany-like, could this be akin to the willingness to be an attentive Samaritan (enhanced by the marginalized perspectives), arising, again, via a habitual or disciplined prayer of his heart?¹⁷ For any such situation one’s response could be that of “seeing,” “hearing,” “beholding” and being “remembered” him- or herself – again, for when one encounters the same reality of one’s soul being dissolved, as now in “the other.” An implication of this for urban ministries is for times when the almost habitual tendency to classify “the other” dominates or takes priority over the compassionate but customary messiness of inconvenience

or interruption and risking contamination, which mercy risks for the sake of the wounds of Christ in the other, the other in Christ.

Elsewhere, Merton evokes the tendency of mercy to break any stranglehold that a literal, dominating presence of a strict application of justice might impose on a situation, as via the zealotry of self-righteousness – as dangerously in the current Philippines’ president showing no mercy with his “shoot-to-kill” orders on alleged drug dealers.¹⁸ Merton reflects: “mercy breaks into the world of magic and justice and overturns its apparent consistency. . . . It liberates us from the tragic seriousness of the obsessive world which we have ‘made up’ for ourselves by yielding to our obsessions. . . . Law is consistent; Grace is ‘inconsistent.’”¹⁹ Not alone, such a notion of mercy intimates qualities of the transcendent which is the sure ground for the whole climate of mercy.²⁰ It also intimates the role of creativity and that of the place and promise of forgiveness. On the latter, political philosopher Hannah Arendt has professed that forgiveness “is the key to action and freedom.”²¹ This dovetails with a Niebuhr caution that while love without justice tends to sentimentality and even irrelevance, a justice without grace or mercy “degenerates into something less than justice,” as rigidity or harshness.²² Nonetheless, the judgment element in the application of justice endures via Niebuhr and the school of “Christian realism” he helped to shape (and still influences). The laborers in the vineyard parable illustrates the merciful aspect of God’s justice-with-mercy while the Last Judgment parable (and much of Niebuhr’s writings throughout his four decades of teaching and activism) insists that human policies and activities are to be held accountable, to the end or, at least pen-ultimately – our personal ends.²³

The Merton and Niebuhr implications for urban ministries could end here, but to do so seems premature and incomplete. Paradoxes and creative tensions endure: between justice as an inevitable, also ultimate, judgment on human affairs, and mercy as that which, while oft appearing to be a contradiction of a strict application of justice, is of the heart of the Creator-Redeemer and our final hope. In this context, to expect from Merton and Niebuhr a necessary *and* sufficient set of resources for mature or seasoned ministry for the long haul is unrealistic. To be sure, both were seasoned spiritual writers – also intentional social commentators that elicited and commended the implications of the Christian faith and its normative biblical themes for the poignant issues of their (and our) day. But they can hardly be totally adequate on their own and even in concert with one another (though they surely come close!).

What makes the pursuit of “success” in ministry an elusive reality, if not at times a plain illusion, are the fierce pressures with which ministries in the city have to function. In addition to the pressures that come with sheer size, density, diversity or heterogeneity of urban living – Louis Wirth’s once classic formulation of what constitutes “urbanism as a way of life”²⁴ – there are the fierce current pressures of economic forces that favor the propertied class and their investments, especially when global, but thwart the remainder, especially the under- or un-organized. Hence the relentless gentrification pressures have morphed into the phenomena of prohibitive rent increase burdens and even “reno-victions,” which impact more than even the poor and working classes.²⁵ There endures a combination of racism with classism, exacerbated by ethnocentrism and “cultural wars.” In any event, this reflection takes heart from a pastoral – and one hopes, a prophetic – application of the conviction that mercy matters. Mercy matters for the long haul and that may be the mature way to depict “success” (longevity rather than mere numbers or bottom-line results). Mercy matters for urban-ministry practitioners, for when we confess our sense of failing for those we seek to serve – and closing the door, alas, to being served by those who have much to teach us in their experiences of being sinned against, but never, as with St.

Paul, rendered to be in total despair, forsaken or destroyed (2 Cor. 4:8-9). One thinks of Niebuhr's final sermonic volume (of three), *Justice and Mercy*, edited by his wife, Ursula Niebuhr. It includes succinct prayers, many expressing mercy, to accompany the sermons (see especially 8, 9, 11, 45-46, 53, 60, 71, 73, 75, 88-89, 92, 95, 97, 99, 100-102, 120-21, 131, 134).²⁶ One may also draw upon Merton's letter to Coretta Scott King in the aftermath of her husband Martin Luther King, Jr.'s April 4, 1968 assassination, in which he writes: "In imitation of his Master he has laid down his life for his friends and enemies. He knew the nation was under judgment . . . My prayers are with you and with him. May he find the rest and reward which God promised to all who trust in His *mercy*."²⁷ A conclusion feels almost complete for what both of these stalwart persons bequeath to contemporary lay and commissioned ministers by way of their legacies. We look to their life, thought and public-prophetic witness, to what led them to the faith, sustained them in the faith, and often if not always served as check and balance for their sometimes ambivalent, always imperfect faith communities, but ever renewing them in the faith of being fellow travelers with the Pioneer of such a faith (Heb. 12:2) and its call to constant discipleship.

When it comes to expanding on a compelling perspective for urban ministry, with a theology hopefully grounded in the depth and range of mercy, it might be possible to add to all the above, but not without first taking with an utmost seriousness what Merton's and Niebuhr's complementary witness conveys. There are temptations to "succeed" that loom large for urban ministries, especially when they (inevitably) chase money at a year's end so to survive via annual reports that assemble statistics to (try to) make a successful case for the ministry's work. Merton and Niebuhr seemed relatively free from such temptations though they helpfully confessed the temptation.²⁸ Nevertheless, what grounds and encourages a ministry is that which is utterly primordial *to and from* the nature of an almighty and merciful God who lures forth and confirms a faithful public and prophetic witnesses, and with their abiding witness summon us. Such expresses the nature of what makes for and sustains steadfastness, or *chesed*.²⁹ A concluding haiku expresses this dynamic:

Mercy ever anew:
Sustains steadfast processes
Persevering Ministries.

1. See for example Merton's moving journal entry of August 7, 1960, with its commingling elements of confession, petition and an implicit intercession in a climate of mercy (Thomas Merton, *Turning Toward the World: The Pivotal Years. Journals, vol. 4: 1960-1963*, ed. Victor A. Kramer [San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1996] 28). Christine Bochen draws due attention to several other apt sources and places in Merton's writings on this theme in "'Mercy within Mercy within Mercy': Presidential Address – ITMS Seventh General Meeting, June 7, 2001," *The Merton Seasonal* 26.3 (Fall 2001) 3-8; subsequent references will be cited as "Bochen" parenthetically in the text. Liturgically, of course, "Lord – or Christ – have mercy" is part of one's regular or earlier spiritual/religious conditioning as in the mass or communion.
2. Alfred North Whitehead (via Reinhold Niebuhr), *An Interpretation of Christian Ethics* (New York: Harper & Bros., 1935) 66; cf. Paul's preaching and making use of an altar's inscription "To an unknown God" and from this proclaiming the God "in whom we live and move and have our being" (Acts 17:28).
3. I am indebted to H. Richard Niebuhr for this three-fold description of evil: see *Radical Monotheism and Western Culture* (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1970) 103.
4. William Blake, *The Poetry and Prose*, ed. David V. Erdman (Garden City, NY: Doubleday Anchor) 12-13; Merton alludes to this poem in the final lines of his early poem "The Holy Sacrament of the Altar" (Thomas Merton, *The Collected Poems of Thomas Merton* [New York: New Directions, 1977] 50-51).
5. See Thomas Merton, *The Sign of Jonas* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1953) 360-61 (subsequent references will be cited as "*SJ*" parenthetically in the text) and Reinhold Niebuhr, *Justice & Mercy*, ed. Ursula Niebuhr (New York: Harper &

- Row, 1974) 37, 111; subsequent references will be cited as “R. Niebuhr, *Justice & Mercy*” parenthetically in the text.
6. Cf. James M. Gustafson, whose theological realism and social ethical reflections over decades convey this strong, realistic notion: *Ethics in a Theocentric Perspective: Volume One – Theology and Ethics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981) 250-51, 274.
 7. See “The Good Samaritan,” in Thomas Merton, *Seasons of Celebration* (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1965) 171-82; subsequent references will be cited as “SC” parenthetically in the text.
 8. See H. Richard Niebuhr, *The Responsible Self: An Essay in Christian Moral Philosophy*, with an Introduction by J. M. Gustafson (New York: Harper & Row, 1963) 30-31, 46, 60-61, 97, 167, where some of the origins of response ethics are crisply presented, building on Niebuhr’s formulation that the practice of responsibility is when and where we act in all things as if God is acting upon and to us.
 9. See “The Climate of Mercy,” in Thomas Merton, *Love and Living*, ed. Naomi Burton Stone and Brother Patrick Hart (New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 1979) 203-19; subsequent references will be cited as “L&L” parenthetically in the text.
 10. Reinhold Niebuhr, “Two Parables about Judgment,” in *Beyond Tragedy: Essays on the Christian Interpretation of History* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1937) 253-69; subsequent references will be cited as “R. Niebuhr, *Beyond Tragedy*” parenthetically in the text.
 11. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, “Outline for a Book,” in *Letters and Papers from Prison*, enlarged edition, ed. Eberhard Bethge (New York: Colliers, 1997) 380-82.
 12. See Paul Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, vol. 1 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1951) 238-41.
 13. Reinhold Niebuhr, *Discerning the Signs of the Times: Sermons for Today and for Tomorrow* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1946) 146-47.
 14. “Whatever may be our vocation we called to be witnesses and ministers of the Divine Mercy” (Thomas Merton, *Thoughts in Solitude* [New York: Farrar, Straus and Cudahy, 1958] 102); cf. Claire E. Wolfeich, *Lord, Have Mercy: Praying for Justice with Conviction and Humility* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2006) especially the preface, chapter 1, and chapter 9: conclusion.
 15. Cf. Tyler Wigg-Stevenson: “every time I browse online news, I feel like I am walking down a fiber-optic Jericho road, and the ditches on each side are filled with billions of people in various forms of distress, all crying out. How can I be a neighbor to all of them?” (*The World Is Not Ours to Save: Finding the Freedom to Do Good* [Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 2013] 48).
 16. It is important to note the dialectic of contemplation and social action/justice as Merton attests: see for example on the one hand Thomas Merton, *Contemplative Prayer* (New York: Herder & Herder, 1969) 143-44, affirming the role of contemplation; and on the other hand, stressing its limits, since it “does not feed the hungry; it does not clothe the naked; it does not teach the ignorant; and it does not return the sinner to peace, truth and union with God,” in the Preface to the Argentine edition of Merton’s *Complete Works* (Thomas Merton, “Honorable Reader”: *Reflections on My Work*, ed. Robert E. Daggy [New York: Crossroad, 1989] 42-43).
 17. Merton has aptly depicted discipline as that which arises and sustains one for the long haul, not as a blueprint or road map, but rather “to sharpen our own sense of direction so that when we really get going we can travel without maps” (“Renewal and Discipline” in Thomas Merton, *Contemplation in a World of Action* [Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1971] 109).
 18. See Jim Gomez, “Duterte refuses to halt slayings of drug suspects,” *Vancouver Sun* (August 6, 2016) NP7.
 19. Thomas Merton, *Raids on the Unspeakable* (New York: New Directions, 1966) 32.
 20. I have not done justice to this phrase in this reflection, but see Merton’s essay of that title, dedicated to Albert Schweitzer, and Bochen’s reflections on it in her presidential address.
 21. Hannah Arendt, as cited from a daily meditation Reader for March 22 (*Answers in the Heart* [Central City, MN: Hazeldon Publishing, 1989]; subsequent references will be cited as “Answers” parenthetically in the text); for this same day the Reader emphasizes that mercy is intimately asked of the suffering but recovering addict, to him- or herself: “We’ve been hard on ourselves and without mercy for our failings.” See also Herbert Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1964) xi, n.1, where transcendence is identified as that which overshoots the confines of established discourse; and Alfred North Whitehead, *Adventures of Ideas* (New York: Free Press, 1967) 177, where creativity is described as having the inherent capacity to “hurl itself forward, like a throbbing emotion, to a new transcendent fact.”
 22. Reinhold Niebuhr, *Love & Justice*, ed. D. B. Robertson (Gloucester, MA: Peter Smith, 1976) 28.
 23. See Merton’s reflection on occasion of Br. Mathias’ receiving the sacrament of extreme unction, and attesting therein the “presence of Divine Mercy in the midst of us, in Christ” (Thomas Merton, *A Search for Solitude: Pursuing the*

- Monk's True Life. Journals, vol. 3: 1952-1960*, ed. Lawrence S. Cunningham [San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1996] 215).
24. See Louis Wirth, "Urbanism as a Way of Life," in *Cities and Churches: Readings on the Urban Church*, ed. Robert Lee (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1962) 21-33.
 25. One now needs to be a millionaire to afford to live in my home city of Vancouver, BC; see further Matthew Desmond, *Evicted: Poverty and Profit in the American City* (New York: Crown Publishers, 2016). Local newspaper headlines also attest to this: see Matt Robinson, "In a hot market, complaints about evictions are up sharply," *Vancouver Sun* (August 22, 2016) A1.
 26. See also Niebuhr's prayerful concerns for student Vietnam War resisters and protesters, as when he was forced into a "View from the Sidelines," in *The Essential Reinhold Niebuhr: Selected Essays and Addresses*, ed. Robert MacAfee Brown (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987) 250-58.
 27. Thomas Merton, *The Hidden Ground of Love: Letters on Religious Experience and Social Concerns*, ed. William H. Shannon (New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 1985) 451 [emphasis added]; subsequent references will be cited as "HGL" parenthetically in the text.
 28. Merton's religious order and Niebuhr's Union Seminary tenure, among other factors, would have supported their relative freedom from the temptations to "succeed": see Merton's reminiscences on success in "Learning to Live" (*L&L* 11); see also Merton's July 16, 1968 letter to Robert Lawrence Williams: "The market does not know real quality, it just guesses sales value" (*HGL* 606). One of Niebuhr's biographers, Richard Fox, writes of the solid support Niebuhr received while a Detroit urban minister and on his own, including being an emerging "public intellectual" and circuit rider to campuses and ecumenical gatherings, except that his mother, recently widowed, devoted much of her time, as she had with her husband, providing during World War I the kind of support (along with her daughter Hulda) that a pastor needs (and that priests both need and often thankfully receive with rectory housekeepers/cooks) (Richard Fox, *Reinhold Niebuhr: A Biography* [New York: Pantheon Books, 1985] 62-87), and Niebuhr's critique of any sense of a gospel of success: "The gospel of Jesus is not a gospel of success, but of ultimate success through obvious failure" (89).
 29. See Bochen, drawing from liberation theology via Jon Sobrino, especially the emphasis on "the principle of mercy" (not only a basic attitude). She writes: "The climate of mercy demands compassionate response to the immediacy of suffering before us," adding "it also requires that mercy becomes the principle that informs our actions as a society and as a church" (7). Relevant to both Merton and Niebuhr, she helpfully concludes that "The principle of mercy requires that we alleviate suffering as well as *identify and address the roots of that suffering*" (7 [emphasis added]). Finally, thinking of mercy as a principle, it emerges in twelve-step meditation literature as an encouraged eleventh step: "to practice these principles [of recovery, including prayer and meditation] in all of our affairs, and the writer therein evoking that mercy join with benevolence for such a commitment" (*Answers*, August 23 reading).