A Testament of Confession and Witness: Thomas Merton's Christian, Monastic and Personalist Philosophy

By **Jonathan Montaldo**

> Philosophy is a concrete attitude and determinate life-style, which engages the whole of existence. The philosophical act is not situated merely on the cognitive level but on that of the self and of being. It is a progress which causes us to *be* more fully and makes us better. It is a conversion which turns our entire life upside down, changing the life of the person who goes through it. It raises the individual from an inauthentic state of life, darkened by unconsciousness and harassed by worry, to an authentic state of life in which one attains self-consciousness, an exact vision of the world, inner peace, and freedom.
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> Pierre Hadot[1]

> There are books from which one emerges a different person than one was when one opened them.
>
> Jeannie Carlier[2]

The French historian of ancient philosophies Pierre Hadot (d. 2010) has reemphasized the view that ancient literary works associated with Plato, Aristotle, Epictetus and the Stoics are teaching notes and instructions on performing "spiritual exercises" intended to convert student philosophers to an art of living. Philosophy that is limited only to abstract discourse and exegesis of texts devalues or ignores these procedures for transfiguring the self beyond the self, for prompting a movement within a person's inner experience from ignorance toward seeking wisdom. Ancient philosophy, then, is grounded in "spiritual exercises." A person who exercises herself in seeking wisdom by her manner of living, even if she teaches or writes nothing, is a philosopher.

However, in an essay honoring Hadot,[3] Richard Shusterman stresses the importance of written accounts of a philosopher's "spiritual exercises" in educating students to live philosophically. When the written accounts of the teacher's inner experience are artful, aiming for beauty of expression, they inculcate in readers their need to become philosophers. While agreeing with Hadot that one can live philosophically without ever writing or speaking a word about it, Shusterman sees value in the written records of the inner dialogues that propelled an examined life along. Meditating on them, students can cultivate fields of possible inner experiences in which to

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propel themselves for finding direction and motivation for growing their own spiritual lives.

Writing a note to himself on April 14, 1966, Thomas Merton isolated his best writing into a category of "confession and witness" in opposition to his writing that was "authoritarian, the declaration of musts, and the announcement of punishments."[4] His best writing offered personal creative reflections that inquired and praised, appealed to readers and evoked their love for God. Writing was his way of caring for his self and for others. Writing punctuated the flow of his quest for personal transformation and became his philosopher's way to serve the existential, spiritual formation of his readers. His autobiographical writing mirrors inner experiences that educate his "honorable reader."[5] By exposing paradoxical and opposing levels of his self on a journey of personal integration, Merton consoles a reader into likewise paying the cost to transform her life from self-centered mindfulness to a universal perspective and Divine point of view.

An article of Merton's monastic life was that written disclosures of his "inner self" were "demanded of [him] by the Holy Ghost."[6] By artfully converting his inner dialogues into journals and poetic prose, Merton testified to the contours of privileged moments of his experiencing grace and mercy. He believed such personal disclosures could instigate similar privileged moments of self-recognition for his readers. His autobiographical writing was actually and self-consciously missionary. He transmitted to readers partial records of the climate of his inner life as he transformed his perceptions of the world by leading a Christian philosophical life in a monastic community. By writing autobiographically and honestly, he cultivated an important spiritual practice that instilled in him the virtue of a compassionate transparency. His transparency in writing about himself had a twofold effect: it aimed first to deflect his reader from idolizing his artfully portrayed inner experiences and his idealized picture of his monastic life at Gethsemani. More importantly, he meant his reader to hear his confessions and identify with his struggles as like to their own. There are no easy formulas to swallow if one tries to love Wisdom and desire God.

Writing out his lived philosophy transparently, with all the discipline and self-effacement this required, allowed Merton to produce a body of work that his friend Jean Leclercq might have judged an authentically Christian philosophical "living text."[7] Merton's 1966 note to himself was prescient: his art of "confession and witness" (*LL* 371) might prove the most valuable and enduring aspect of his legacy for the spiritual formation of future generations of his readers.

1. Reading Merton with Pierre Hadot: Seeking Wisdom through the Arts of Contemplative Living

While I have not found any empirical relationship between Merton and Pierre Hadot, whose major work appeared after Merton's death in 1968,[8] I do mean to share my enthusiasm for reading Merton with Hadot's studies on philosophy as "spiritual exercises." Hadot presents philosophy as a way of living; philosophy is grounded in a lived logic, a lived ethics and a lived physics (see Hadot, *Citadel* 89-90). Hadot's conception of philosophy offers a lens for me to read Merton's autobiographical writing as a prolonged "spiritual exercise."[9] When he made his life his writing's subject, he meant to educate both his reader and his own self to the necessary conversions if one seeks wisdom. Merton offered his poetry of personal experience as a mirror for his reader to

realize that his writing implicated her. She, too, must "change [her] life" (Rilke[10]).

Merton was an influential teacher for his contemporaries in a school of philosophy that had its origins in ancient times. These classical philosophies, eventually reinterpreted by early Christian theologians for their ends, are open windows to my better understanding what has attracted me to read and follow Merton for six decades. Reading Merton has converted me to a philosophical life. By writing out of "the very roots of [his] life,"[11] Merton has provided a living testament for me to consult. He has bequeathed a legacy that mentors my contemplation in action. His writing has pushed me to move away, however fitfully, "from an inauthentic condition of life, darkened by unconsciousness and harassed by worry, to an authentic state of life, in which [one] attains self-consciousness, an exact vision of the world, inner peace, and freedom" (Hadot, *Philosophy* 83).

2. Writing as Being

> The work of writing can be for me, or very close to, the simple job of *being*: by creative reflection and awareness to help life itself live in me, to give its *esse* an existent, or to find place, rather, in *esse* by action, intelligence and love. For to write is love: it is to inquire and to praise, or to confess, or to appeal. This testimony of love remains necessary. Not to reassure myself that I am ("I write therefore I am"), but simply to pay my debt to life, to the world, to other men. To speak out with an open heart and say what seems to me to have meaning. The bad writing I have done has been authoritarian, the declaration of musts, and the announcement of punishments. Bad because it implies a lack of love, good insofar as there may yet have been some love in it. The best stuff has been more straight confession and witness. (*LL* 371)

Merton's note to himself in 1966 confessed that he lived more mindfully and expansively when he was writing personally. To write autobiographically was his way of being alive, of participating in Being. He wrote that writing was his way "to think and to live . . . even to pray" (*SS* 219 [9/27/1958]). The discipline of writing journals was his *ascesis* of attention to the present movement of persons and life-events he was encountering that became epiphanies of an existential providence that guided him toward a vocation to be in interrelationships with all beings. Writing personally from the "roots of [his] life" was a spiritual discipline, not only a means of aesthetic self-expression. Writing personally for him was an exercise of virtue to pay his "debt to life, to the world, to other men."

By writing, he externalized key elements of his inner search for coherence and truth. Certainly, not all of his journal writing rose to conveying instants of contemplative insight artfully expressed, but many moments he inscribes for posterity are appealing instances of ecstasy when he is transcending himself in inquiry, in praise and in confessions. Examples of such intensely devotional moments from his journals could constitute a book. Writing thus became Merton's "testimony of love." His writing gave permanence to spiritual experiences that might prove useful to an honorable reader who meditates on them. His transparency allows a reader to recognize the movement of his spiritual experiences that resonate with her own. She

can "take Merton with her" (Merton *vade mecum*[12]) as an analog of the teacher who wishes to engage her in dialogue as she becomes a "truer self." As she communes with these testaments to Merton's inner experience, she compares her ways of living in the world with his. He inspires her devotion to wisdom and contemplation. Reading Merton, she hears the "words under the words" (Naomi Shihab Nye[13]) that Merton writes. She experiences his life and hers as inter-textual as she joins Merton in writing her own paragraph into God's Book of Life.

Merton's legacy of written inner dialogues begets a call to an inner journey in his readers. With his words as a musical accompaniment, how many journeys of inner experience from ignorance toward seeking wisdom has Merton launched? To how many honorable readers has Merton transmitted a philosophy of lived spiritual experience that has deeply affected their spiritual formations in seeking wisdom?

3. The "Sparks of Truth" Captured in Poetry and Journals Were His "Real Work"

> Value of retreat – realizing how much one "escapes" from "time" by activity. How much our work can be simply a desperate expedience for reassuring ourselves that we are "using time" well; "giving a good account" of ourselves etc. "Value" (?) of time is not in time but in clarity of thought: the moments when we see through time and everything else, and see our way "*through*" everything. Time is valuable only for the moments that cut across and through it vertically. Yet these moments must not be sought and exploited only to reinforce a sense of absolute validity in our own ego-self. (For then they are not authentic.) They are to be moments of obedience to Him who wills to love in us (not separate from us but identified with us). This means regarding poetry as more essentially my *work* (instead of an accidental pastime) in working. Poetry – includes Journal and poetic prose – records of poetic (creative) instants. (*LL* 353 [1/18/1966])
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> Beauty and *necessity* (for me) of solitary life – apparent in the sparks of truth, small, recurring flashes of a reality that is *beyond doubt*, momentarily appearing, leading me further on my way. Things that need no explanation and perhaps have none, but which say: "Here! This way!" And with final authority! It is for them that I will be held responsible. Nothing but immense gratitude! They cancel out all my mistakes, weaknesses, evasions, falsifications. They lead further and further in that direction that has been shown me, and to which I am called. (*LL* 367 [3/6/1966])

In his note of January 18, 1966, written after the monastery's yearly retreat, Merton reflected on how this formal withdrawal from habitual activity during retreats highlights how much he escapes Time's real value by his diversionary busyness, as he thoughtlessly used up and spent chronological time. In a retreat's suspension of his ordinary and ingrained habits of reflection and living, he experienced "flashes of a reality" accessible to everyone: "the moments when we see through time and everything else and see our way '*through*' everything. Time is valuable only for the moments that cut across and through it vertically."

Merton's journal writing was a form of spiritual retreat and writing was his paradoxical way of keeping silence. He listened for instruction beyond his too narrow ways of experiencing Time so that a more inclusive, universal "voice may speak" (Mary Oliver[14]). In silence, writing journals, he waits for the moments of illumination provided by his conscious "obedience to Him who wills to love in us (not separate from us but identified with us)." These written "records of poetic (creative) instants" revealed epiphanies for him of the "sparks of truth" that illumined his paths toward contemplative living. Moments of contemplative realization in writing allowed him to create a way of living forward that led him "further and further in that direction that [had] been shown [him] and to which [he was] called." Sharing these moments with his readers, he purposefully mentors their attention to similar "sparks" that suddenly enter their consciousness and equally call them out to have their lives more abundantly graced by living in a "vertical Time" that renders them more "alive and awake," one of Merton's definitions of contemplation.[15]

4. Merton's Vocation to Be Compassionately Transparent

> To be as good a monk as I can, and to remain myself, and to write about it: to put myself down on paper, in such a situation, with the most complete simplicity and integrity, masking nothing, confusing no issue: this is very hard, because I am all mixed up in illusions and attachments. These, too, will have to be put down. But without exaggeration, repetition, useless emphasis. No need for breast-beating and lamentation before the eyes of anyone but You, O God, who see the depths of my fatuity. To be frank without being boring. It is a kind of crucifixion. Not a very dramatic or painful one. But it requires so much honesty that it is beyond my nature. It must come somehow from the Holy Ghost. One of the results of all this could well be a complete and holy transparency: living, praying, and writing in the light of the Holy Spirit**,** losing myself entirely by becoming public property just as Jesus is public property in the Mass. Perhaps this is an important aspect of my priesthood – my living of my Mass: to become as plain as a Host in the hands of everybody.[16]

> Since my retreat I have been having another one of those nervous breakdowns. The same old familiar business. I am getting used to it now – since the old days in 1936, when I thought I was going to crack up on the Long Island Railroad, and the more recent one since ordination. And now this. I think it is good to write it down, without asking too many questions as to why it is good. The writing of it forms part of a documentation that is demanded of me – still demanded, I think – by the Holy Ghost. . . . It is always a relief to see the truth, and I find peace in confessing it. . . . The light of truth burns without a flicker in the depths of a house that is shaken with storms of passion and of fear. *Non timebis a timore nocturno* [You will not fear the terror of the night (Psalm 90:5 in the Vulgate)]. And so I go on trying to walk on the waters of the breakdown. Worse than ever before and better than ever before. It is always painful and reassuring when He who I am not is visibly destroyed by the hand of God in order that the simplicity

> in the depths of me, which is His image, may be set free to serve Him in peace. Sometimes in the midst of all this I am tremendously happy, and I have never in my life begun to be so grateful for His mercy. (*SS* 20-22 [10/22/1952])

In his journal written in the middle of "one of those nervous breakdowns," Merton realized his philosophical vocation to witness to others the pattern of God's providential mercies to him through his life's crises of confused inner experiences. A testament of honest journal writing was "part of a documentation that [was] demanded of [him] by the Holy Ghost." In his journal for September 1, 1949, he acknowledged that he would become a monk by writing down how he was becoming a monk. It required "so much honesty that it is beyond my nature," but this discipline of transparency released energies for transforming himself. Writing provided him a place to stand in the truth of his need for grace. Writing personally was a spiritual exercise because it invited supernatural intervention: it "must come somehow from the Holy Ghost."

By revealing his false selves in writing, publicly exorcising, for instance, his attachments to his literary fame and his poses as a celebrity monk for public consumption, he exposed his reader to her own ignorance in thinking she could ever be somebody's guru. His reader contacts through Merton her own hidden confusion of competing desires between honesty and wanting to be thought wise. Writing journals for publication schooled Merton in "a complete and holy transparency: living, praying, and writing in the light of the Holy Spirit, losing myself entirely by becoming public property just as Jesus is public property in the Mass. Perhaps this is an important aspect of my priesthood – my living my Mass: to become as plain as a Host in the hands of everybody."

5. Suspended Entirely by God's Mercy, Content for Anything to Happen

> The annual retreat is ending. . . . I was very deeply moved by Fr. Phelan's conference on the Sacred Heart. Great depth of theology in clear and simple terms. It showed me how there really is an abyss of light in the things the simplest faithful believe and love and which sometimes seem trite to the intellectuals. Indeed, perhaps it is the simplest and most popular truths which are also the deepest after all. For my own part, I think much has been done to me in the course of this retreat – in emptiness and helplessness and humiliation. Aware that I might crack up at any moment. I find, nevertheless, that when I pray, I pray better than ever. I mean by that – I have no longer any special degree of prayer. But simple vocal prayer, and especially the office and the psalms, seems to have acquired a depth and a simplicity I never knew before in *any* prayer. I have nothing but faith and the love of God and confidence in the simple means He has given me for reaching Him. Suspended entirely from His mercy, I am content for anything to happen. (*SS* 25 [11/29/1952])

Readers of Merton's literature who idolize him will find reading his extant personal journals a stumbling block to burning more incense. Those who seek an ideal Merton will not avoid the "tears" that stain the pages of his journal, forcing them to confront his compunction at his

not being the monk he knew he ought to be. They will be unable to ignore his fears that much of his writing would leave a false impression of his wisdom and holiness on countless readers. Merton's journals force upon his reader an uncomfortable truth: one is capable of writing and speaking beautifully about the spiritual life without exercising oneself in actually living a beautiful spiritual life. Like Socrates as a pattern of the ancient philosopher, Merton desired that his journals would diminish his standing with his adoring crowds by giving hard evidence that he was unwise but in search of wisdom. He was not already "living with" Wisdom but following ancient ways for "moving toward" Wisdom's house.

A spider often experiences its carefully constructed web being blown away by a strong wind: securely fastened in one moment, in the next it dangles by one string. The spider wavers but holds on until the gust dies down so that reconstruction can begin on a new matrix for its living. Likewise, the web of Merton's certainties and secure philosophical positions was often dissolved as he exposed in writing the limitations of his perceptions and his obtuseness to the complexities of transforming his life by seeking wisdom. These moments of crisis and failure would, he intuited, be significant turning points in his life. Failure might lead to new patterns of spiritual experience. (He wrote that all the trees he planted at his monastery when his life was full of consolations had died, while the pines he had planted in tears and depression were thriving [see *SS* 360]). Through his writing practice Merton sought new occasions for being in hope that whatever was lost to him in crisis and sorrow would actually prefigure a happy gain through grace to come. To hang in these moments of crisis, suspended from one strand that he imaged himself attached to God's mercy, energized his writing and his life for the next task and sign. These moments of crisis were the truly good and beautiful epiphanies of the Holy Spirit in his life since they provoked his dependence on God's "Mercy within mercy within mercy" (*ES* 488).

6. A Philosopher's Vocation: I Mean to Speak to You as Your Own Self

I am paraphrasing Pierre Hadot's teaching (Hadot, *Happiness* 147) that the communicated inner experiences of a philosopher can mean more to their students than their dogmas and *dicta*, authoritarian pronouncements of "oughts" and "shoulds." If philosophers say directly what they believe the student should do, they communicate false certainties. But when philosophers speak openly about their struggling spiritual experiences, they offer students a glimpse of a spiritual attitude. They allow a call to be heard beyond their own words and experiences that their student has the freedom to accept or refuse. The student is given the freedom to believe or not to believe, to act or not to act. "My vocation and task in this world is to keep alive all that is usefully individual and personal in me, to be a 'contemplative' in the full sense – and to share it with others – to remain as a witness of the nobility of the private person and his primacy over the group" (*SS* 221 [10/2/1958]).

> Therefore, most honorable reader, it is not as an author that I would speak to you, not as a story-teller, not as a philosopher, not as a friend only: I seek to speak to you, in some way, as your own self. Who can tell what this may mean? I myself do not know. But if you listen, things will be said that are perhaps not written in this book. And this will be due not to me, but to One who lives and speaks in us both! *("HR"* 67)

Approaching an end to my six decades of conversing with Merton's most personal voice, I am returning to the basic elements that have attracted me to his teaching. At this juncture of my life I am realizing a time is coming when I shall read no more. So now I am ignoring all the secondary literature about Merton, and even the classics of his spiritual writing, like *New Seeds of Contemplation*, to return to the sources primary in their power to effect changes in my own behavior and philosophy of life: *The Seven Storey Mountain*, *The Sign of Jonas*[17] and *Conjectures of A Guilty Bystander*.[18] This trinity of his personal books has served as sanctuaries along my pilgrimage. They have called me aside from diversion to focus on my deepest questions mirrored for me in Merton's sentences as they elaborate his own quandaries. Upon the ropes of his most personal sentences, I have learned to tread his path along a ledge between a frivolous life on the one hand and a humanly dignified philosophical life on the other. Merton's autobiographical writings are the archives to which I have habitually repaired to study what it existentially means to live in hope that our personal lives have more value than meets our eyes.

Merton's love of learning and desire for God has inspired me to transcend my too narrow false selves. Merton's "tears," his ardor for God's mercy to grace his life, have caused my own to flow. Merton's prayers, arising from the roots of his own life, have watered the roots of my own life's contemplation. His artful presentation of his spiritual and practical deficiencies as a monk and writer have consoled me as I recognize myself in his own journal's assessment of his life: "I am nobody's answer, not even my own" (*LL* 308). Merton knew himself to be a "man of no title,"[19] an ordinary person consumed with excavating the meaning of his experience and his perceptions of the world and the times through which he lived and had his being. He has taught me that, like him, no matter how much I admire myself for what I can do or think, I must always seek out places where I can kneel and wait for a Mercy I now wisely realize that I can never bequeath to myself.

Merton's was a lyric voice originating out of and developing its modulations through a commitment to philosophy in a particular Christian monastic community in the twentieth century. He is unique among contemporary monks in positioning himself as a missionary for the value to others of his own personal experience in living critically, questioning the dominant culture imposed by the western secular and religious institutions into which he was born. His lived philosophy emphasized the value of the person and the personal. He sought to elude and re-envision the enforced norms of behavior acceptable for human beings in American society and, most immediately in his life situation, for a monk of his Trappist community during the years from 1941 until his death in 1968. He broke the mold of the acceptable image of the monk as an isolated twirler of rosary beads. He politically transcended being an American to pay his debts to all human beings alive in the world of his time. He paid his debts forward by making certain that his words would be legally preserved for those who might find it somehow valuable to read them after his death.

As he underwent his early conversions to Christian philosophy, they impelled him to abandon the world and his false self in the world as though he had to swim away from a sinking ship. Leaving Manhattan to its fate was one of his important early spiritual exercises. But through later conversions, he gradually matured to abandon the life raft of an institutionalized philosophical monastic life and set his sails toward living beyond himself in the radiance of a

vision of God that embraced in love the entire world he had once sought to flee. Paraphrasing Hadot again, in his study *The Inner Citadel: The Meditations of Marcus Aurelius*, Merton's journals manifest his mature inner choices to live justly in the service of others (see Hadot, *Citadel* 36). They exhibit his progressively expansive global attitudes. They enunciate his more mature vision of the world's ground as hidden but reasonable and providentially loved by God.

Merton co-created his destiny in dialogues with that Voice, outside of himself and within himself, who called him to live contemplatively, that is, fully conscious and alive. Merton died a philosopher, one not yet wise but stumbling faltering and passionately forward toward Wisdom. He experienced his relationship with that "hidden ground of Love for which there can be no explanations."[20] A hidden Love and Mercy, glimpsed beyond his tears, were the foundations upon which he created his deep and expansive human life offered to the world of his readers. In the end, Merton experienced his own life and his part in the universe as "infinitely rich full of inexhaustible interest opening out into infinite further possibilities for study and contemplation and interest and praise" (*SS* 45 [7/17/1956]). Before he died, he passed on to his honorable readers a sample of his life's continuing moments of illumination. Even if his being in time has passed, his literature of confession and witness still calls out in the marketplace: no matter all our confusing experiences of inner darkness and light, know that "Beyond all and in all is God" (*SS* 45), and that in the words of Julian of Norwich, "all will be well in the end."[21]

1. Pierre Hadot, *Philosophy as a Way of Life*, edited with an introduction by Arnold I. Davidson, translated by Michael Chase (Oxford: Blackwell, 1995) 82-83; subsequent references will be cited as "Hadot, *Philosophy*" parenthetically in the text.
2. Pierre Hadot, *The Present Alone Is Our Happiness: Conversations with Jeannie Carlier and Arnold I. Davidson*, translated by Marc Djaballah and Michael Chase (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2011) 145; subsequent references will be cited as "Hadot, *Happiness*" parenthetically in the text.
3. Richard Shusterman, "Philosophy as a Way of Life: As Textual and More than Textual Practice," *Philosophy as a Way of Life: Ancients and Moderns – Essays in Honor of Pierre Hadot* (Oxford: Wiley Blackwell, 2013) 40-56.
4. Thomas Merton, *Learning to Love: Exploring Solitude and Freedom. Journals, vol. 6: 1966-1967*, ed. Christine M. Bochen (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1997) 371; subsequent references will be cited as "*LL*" parenthetically in the text.
5. The term comes from Merton's 1963 Preface to the Japanese translation of *The Seven Storey Mountain*; see Thomas Merton, "*Honorable Reader": Reflections on My Work*, ed. Robert E. Daggy (New York: Crossroad, 1989) 67; subsequent references will be cited as *"HR"* parenthetically in the text.
6. 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) 20; subsequent references will be cited as "*SS*" parenthetically in the text.
7. See Leclercq's classic text *The Love of Learning and the Desire for God*, translated by Catharine Misrahi (New York: Fordham University Press, 1961); see also his introduction to Thomas Merton, *Contemplation in a World of Action* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1971) ix-xx.
8. In addition to *Philosophy as a Way of Life*, first published in French in 1987, and *The Present Alone Is Our Happiness*, first published in French in 2002, see the following translations of Hadot by Michael Chase: *Plotinus or the Simplicity of Vision* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993; French original: 1989); T*he Inner Citadel: The Meditations of Marcus Aurelius* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001; French original: 1992) (subsequent references will be cited as "Hadot, *Citadel*" parenthetically in the text); *What Is Ancient Philosophy?* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002; French original: 1995); *The Veil of Isis: An Essay on the History of the Idea of Nature* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006; French original: 2004).
9. This essay was initially presented at the symposium entitled "Thomas Merton: Prophecy and Renewal" held in

June 2018 at the Athenaeum Sant'Anselmo in Rome, and was dedicated to Lynn Szabo, editor of *In the Dark before Dawn: Selected Poems of Thomas Merton*, who served as its mentor through many hours of dialogue with the author.

10. See Rainer Maria Rilke, "Archaic Torso of Apollo," l. 14, in *Ahead of All Parting: The Selected Poetry and Prose of Rainer Maria Rilke*, trans. Stephen Mitchell (New York: Modern Library, 2015) 67.
11. Thomas Merton, *The Seven Storey Mountain* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1948) 111.
12. This is the title (meaning "Go with Me" in Latin) given by Patricia Burton to her invaluable timeline of Merton's life and writings: see Patricia M. Burton, *Merton Vade Mecum: A Quick-Reference Bibliographic Handbook*, 4th ed. (Louisville, KY: Thomas Merton Center, 2016).
13. See Naomi Shihab Nye, "The Words Under the Words," in *Tender Spot: Selected Poems*, 2nd ed. (Hexham, UK: Bloodaxe Books, 2015) 103-104.
14. See "Praying," l. 10, in Mary Oliver, *Thirst* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2006) 38.
15. See Thomas Merton, *New Seeds of Contemplation* (New York: New Directions, 1961) 1: "Contemplation is the highest expression of man's intellectual and spiritual life. It is that life itself, fully awake, fully active, fully aware that it is alive."
16. Thomas Merton, *Entering the Silence: Becoming a Monk and Writer. Journals, vol. 2: 1941-1952*, ed. Jonathan Montaldo (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1996) 365 (9/1/1949); subsequent references will be cited as "*ES*" parenthetically in the text.
17. Thomas Merton, *The Sign of Jonas* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1953).
18. Thomas Merton, *Conjectures of a Guilty Bystander* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1966).
19. Thomas Merton, *Zen and the Birds of Appetite* (New York: New Directions, 1968) 61.
20. Thomas Merton, *The Hidden Ground of Love: Letters on Religious Experience and Social Concerns*, ed. William H. Shannon (New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 1985) 115.
21. See Thomas Merton, *Mystics and Zen Masters* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1967) 143.