

Thomas Merton: Role Model for Catholics Who Practice Yoga Today

By Allyson Huval

Across from a historic bed and breakfast is Balance: Well-being Yoga & Consulting, an office space turned yoga studio in Abbeville, Louisiana. Kathryn Mobley opened her doors to the community in 2018, becoming the first yoga studio owner in this small town. Her services include yoga, aerial yoga, health consultations and numerous workshops to benefit physical, mental and spiritual health. States away is Anne Phyfe Palmer, owner of Eight Limbs Yoga in Seattle, Washington, who champions yoga as a substitute for “church in a spiritual context and also as a community.”¹ Ranked in the top 15 yoga studios in Seattle with 4 locations, students praise Eight Limbs Yoga for its accepting culture. These studios represent the massive numbers of yoga studios scattered across the United States, as yoga has become a popular form of exercise, meditation and personal spirituality. In fact, many of the spiritual “nones” – those who have no affiliation with any organized or institutionalized religious community – are replacing church services with bhakti yoga, known as the yoga of devotion, on Sunday mornings. The modern concept of “yoga church” mirrors the Hindu American Foundation’s interpretation of yoga as “always ‘a means of spiritual attainment.’”²

Americans understand yoga as a pathway to a new spiritual awakening, not merely as a fitness practice, and its rise is virtually inescapable. From the countless mindfulness techniques to the growing “yoga-wear” industry, most Americans either know what yoga is or they have practiced it themselves. Many have translated the Sanskrit titles of poses to English as one attempt to Christianize yoga.³ For example, Wheaton College, a major intellectual center of Evangelical Christianity, promoted “redeeming yoga” to serve their students’ Christian faith and to engage an increasingly apathetic congregation.⁴ Redeeming yoga refers to Wheaton’s efforts to integrate the physical elements of yoga into a Christian context, using breathing techniques and mind-body awareness to improve the students’ well-being and spiritual life. While some Christians have objected to the incorporation of yoga into their spiritual lives on the basis of a supposed incompatibility with their faith in a way that compares to, say, a conservative Protestant resistance to fictional literature (see Brown 662), yet many modern Christians have found meaning in a faith-based synthesis of Christianity and yogic practice.

Like their Protestant co-religionists, Catholics have also exhibited diverse reactions to yoga. Pope Francis, for example, has expressed hesitation towards yoga in his statement, “you can take a thousand courses in catechesis, a thousand courses in spirituality, a thousand courses in yoga,

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Zen and all these things. But all of this will never be able to give you the freedom of the Son; only the Holy Spirit moves your heart to say ‘Father.’”⁵ One conservative Catholic exorcist, Father Amorth, even went so far as to explicitly condemn any synthesis of yogic practice and Catholic belief.⁶ And yet, lay Catholics, monks and lower clergy members continue to see in yoga a promising complement to a Catholic theology and worldview. Jean-Marie Déchanet, a Benedictine monk hailed as the “father of Christian yoga,” made the earliest such endorsement.⁷ Since his work in the mid-twentieth century, some clergy members have proclaimed their support of Christian yoga. Father Thomas Ryan, CSP, the founder of Christians Practicing Yoga, published his first book nearly thirty years after Déchanet’s *Christian Yoga* and explored the correspondence between yoga and Christian (read: Catholic) meditation, full-body prayer and mystical experience. For Ryan, Christian yoga “fosters the realization of the union [between the Christian and God] which is already present”; anything that “positively contributes to our awareness of this union deserves consideration as a discipline leading to a more abundant life.”⁸ Catholic journalist Heidi Schlumpf has professed that “yoga makes [her] a better Catholic.”⁹ Styles of Catholic yoga have even become something that organizations trademark: Ignatian Yoga, founded by the Jesuit priests Bobby Karle and James Martin, combines the spirituality of Ignatius of Loyola with yogic practice and even offers yoga classes in the sanctuary of Catholic churches.¹⁰

A figure key for the developing popularity of Catholic yoga has been, I believe, the famous Trappist monk Thomas Merton (1915-1968), whose emphasis on Catholic ecumenism established the foundation on which later laypeople and clergy members would build Catholic yoga. After a European upbringing and an education at Columbia University, he converted to Catholicism in 1938 and joined the Abbey of Gethsemani in Kentucky as a Trappist monk.¹¹ It was here that he worked diligently with the practices of mysticism, contemplative prayer and interreligious dialogue through study and personal experience. Merton’s later-in-life ecumenism reflected a post-Vatican II Catholicism, though his ecumenical contacts began nearly two decades before.¹² The Second Vatican Council invited Catholics to engage with their religious neighbors by emphasizing ecumenical tolerance and, because of this, Catholics experienced a shift towards progressive values.¹³ Merton’s ecumenical approach to monastic thought and practice brought him to think deeply about Buddhist meditation and its contributions to Catholic contemplative prayer, for which the Dalai Lama praised Merton as a “master of contemplation.”¹⁴

While Merton only explicitly addresses yoga in his writings a handful of times, his significance for it lies in the basic attitude of ecumenism that he promoted within late twentieth-century Catholic culture. Interreligious dialogue sets the terms, so to speak, for the Catholic exploration of yoga as a habitual spiritual practice. Advocates of Catholic yoga have drawn on Merton’s notion of contemplative prayer and applied it to yoga so that the practitioner can analyze her soul’s relationship with the Triune God. Merton, then, establishes a discourse of mysticism, contemplative prayer and ultimately, interreligious dialogue, without which it would be difficult to imagine the practice of Catholic yoga coming to fruition. Merton’s thought on mysticism emerges most clearly in *A Course in Christian Mysticism*, a series of conferences mainly presented to newly ordained monks at Gethsemani in 1961.¹⁵ Although he identified mystical experience as crucial to his own religious development in *The Seven Storey Mountain*,¹⁶ *A Course in Christian Mysticism* provides something of a textbook for Catholics seeking to cultivate mystical experience through theological study. Merton draws on a long tradition of Catholic mystical thought, which

has so many parallels in other religious traditions that Carl Jung¹⁷ has declared that all religions have mysticism at their core.¹⁸ The Christian mystical tradition dates as far back as the Apostle Paul and continues throughout other New Testament writings like the Gospel of John, a text that provided language on Christ's incarnation – the union of humanity and divinity – that profoundly affected Merton's mystical focus on the Incarnation (see *CCM* 12-19). For Merton, mysticism and Catholic theology are fundamentally linked because neither can exist without the other: "Without mysticism there is no real theology, and without theology there is no real mysticism" (*CCM* 1). Catholic mystics throughout the centuries deemed building a relationship with God to the point of becoming one with God as the purpose of theology.

Mysticism is essential in beginning to conceptualize the relationship between Christianity and yoga. A mystical experience can be achieved through mindfulness meditation, liturgical rituals, physical practices or devotional prayer. The Sanskrit cognate *yogins*, a term that frequently translates as "mystics," illustrates the connection more directly (see Coward 80). Merton provided concrete instructions on mystical experiences which are similar to yoga, advising readers to open themselves to a mystical experience through contemplative prayer. The word *yoga* derives from the Sanskrit word *yuj* meaning "to yoke" or "to unite,"¹⁹ referring to *yoga* as a practice to becoming one with the divine. The practice of *yoga* stems from traditional texts such as *Bhagavad Gita* and *Yoga Sutra of Patanjali*,²⁰ as well as *Hatha Yoga Pradipika*.²¹ Like Merton's notion of mystical experience, yogic practices are those that connect the practitioner with a Divine Being. Merton draws this correlation of monks and yogis alike experiencing the "union with God" in a preface he wrote for Dom Denis Rutledge's *In Search of a Yogi*.²² Likewise, Patanjali, said to be the author of the *Yoga Sutras*, describes mystical experiences as the ego's perception of extra-sensory reality (see Coward 77).

This Eastern understanding of *yoga* is analogous to Catholic contemplative prayer because each is a practice to satisfy the yearning of a connection with a higher being. Even Merton found the traditional yogic texts intriguing: he cited the traditional Hindu mystical text *Bhagavad Gita* in his letters and journals, and wrote a brief essay on it;²³ he went as far as including the *Bhagavad Gita* in a list of books that have influenced him;²⁴ and he noted being fascinated by the *Yoga Sutras*.²⁵ Christians use the practice of *yoga* in the service of fostering a desired mystical experience. Christians today are traditionally introduced to a physical practice of *yoga* first through the many *yoga* classes offered in fitness studios. Those who eventually utilize *yoga* as a spiritual practice engage in a Christianized form of *bhakti yoga*, or the *yoga* of devotion.²⁶ *Bhakti yoga* is known as the highest form of *yoga* because through this practice the individual will become one with the ultimate being,²⁷ much like the mystical experience praised by Christian mystics.

Thomas Merton was already heavily influenced by Eastern traditions by the time he presented *A Course in Christian Mysticism*. He also refers to William St. Thierry, the twelfth-century Cistercian theologian and mystic who influenced the author of *Christian Yoga*, Jean-Marie Déchanet. Merton, though, feared that his encouragement of mysticism in a western context would have the effect of diminishing its power: "The West is then to a certain extent predisposed to: water down mysticism, and accept it in a diluted, more devotional form, or else reduce mysticism to speculation and study; insist on social forms, rules, observances, practices, rites" (*CCM* 90). Whatever hesitations he may have had about a widespread exposure to mysticism, Merton

encouraged Catholics to see how it played a central role in the history of the Church and in one's faith-life by stating: "Mystical life . . . is lived in the Church, as a witness of the living and risen Christ" (CCM 19), the resurrection playing a central role to the Catholic faith. Merton's practice with contemplative prayer brought him to a complete union with God, the purpose of mystical experience. By achieving union with God, he fully understood Christ because Christ himself is one with God as conceptualized in Trinitarian doctrine.

The method most likely to lead to mystical experiences, according to Merton, was contemplative prayer, a religious activity that Merton developed over the course of his years at Gethsemani Abbey. It taps into a long tradition of monastic meditation whose goal is mystical union with God. He formulates his most important ideas on it in *Seeds of Contemplation*²⁸ and then later in *New Seeds of Contemplation*.²⁹ He originally defined contemplative prayer as "a deep and simplified spiritual activity in which the mind and will are fused into one" (SC 160; cf. NSC 243). Again, Merton, focused on union with God, which involves an individual's complete surrender and obedience to the divine will. His definition of contemplative life as "a life arranged in such a way that a person can more easily and more simply and more naturally live in an awareness of direct dependence on God"³⁰ remained constant. This dependence on God correlates with Merton's asceticism: "True mystical experience of God and supreme renunciation of everything outside of God coincide" (SC 182; NSC 268). Merton understood contemplative prayer to be a monastic practice uniquely accessible to lay Christians because of its relation to love rather than intellect (see SC 144-51, NSC 225-32). The transcendent love generated by contemplative prayer allows anyone who devotes themselves to God to gaze upon God. Contemplation offered Catholics a special opportunity to affirm their immediate relationship with God and improve their quality of life. Without contemplation, Merton insisted, one cannot resolve spiritual restlessness in the Church.³¹

Even though Merton himself did not directly link contemplation and yoga,³² his thought on the power of contemplative prayer deeply influenced later Catholics and their embrace of yogic practice. One recent writer, Jane Ferguson, conducted a study focusing on meditative centering prayer in Roman Catholicism, which includes practices grounded in the Contemplative Outreach teachings of Thomas Keating, a contemporary and fellow Trappist of Thomas Merton.³³ Contemplative Outreach is an organization that began in response to Vatican II's call to make Catholicism, and especially contemplative prayer, "appealing and accessible to laypeople,"³⁴ much like Merton's work in simplifying contemplative prayer. The goal of centering prayer creates a dual benefit of reducing stress while building a relationship with God (see Ferguson 313), similar to a yoga practice. Many have achieved a contemplative practice solely through yoga,³⁵ even going as far as including yoga in Centering Prayer Retreats hosted by Contemplative Outreach.³⁶ Studies conducted analyzing the effects of meditation and mindfulness for stress reduction are usually based in the Asian traditions even though the presence of meditation in the Catholic tradition is ongoing (see Ferguson 306).

Merton's idea of contemplative prayer corresponds to yoga in definition, practice and spiritual effect. Both Merton's definition of contemplative prayer and the understanding of Christian yoga is a mystical union with God. Merton utilizes contemplative prayer as a devotional practice just as Catholics who practice yoga do. Contemplative prayer practices and Christian yoga fine-tune

the mind and body to be used in adoration of God. In contemplative prayer, the body positions are still, passive and small in number. In yoga, the body positions are larger in number, but are enacted slowly and with great intention. When engaging in both contemplative prayer and Christian yoga, a practitioner experiences spiritual effects by praying with the entire mind and body.

The final aspect of Merton's writings that would set the stage for practitioners of Catholic yoga was his commitment to interreligious dialogue. Merton first encountered Asian religious traditions in college through his peers who introduced him to the Hindu guru Bramachari at Columbia. In this context, Merton later developed an appreciation for interreligious work, thanks to the direct influence of Herman Hesse, Jules Monchanin, Jean-Marie Déchanet and many others. Merton was first introduced to yoga by way of commentary on Patanjali's *Yoga Sutras*. Merton also explored yoga from a Buddhist perspective when he read *Steppenwolf* by Hermann Hesse (1963), in India no less, and was introduced to the concept of India as "a beacon of light for the power struggles of the West" (see Collins 96). Interreligious dialogue challenged Merton as "a renewal of the contemplative life grounded at home, yet also truly open to other traditions as well" (Clooney, "Christian Learning" 50). It was especially Henri Le Saux, OSB (also known as Abhishiktananda), who prompted Merton to engage with Hinduism.³⁷ Jules Monchanin, along with Le Saux, began a contemplative community in India serving as an ashram and hermitage that respected the two cultures,³⁸ influencing Merton by way of interreligious dialogue and contemplative practices (see Clooney, "Christian Learning" 57-61). While Monchanin pioneered Catholic and Hindu dialogue, many at that time, in the period before Vatican II, rejected his beliefs because of his clerical vows rejecting modernity (see Trapnell 45).

Merton was an amateur in his interreligious studies when he became aware of Monchanin's work, and even quoted his obituary in a journal entry in 1959 (see Clooney, "Christian Learning" 61), three years prior to Vatican II. Hinduism played a central role in Merton's correspondence with Jean-Marie Déchanet, who exposed Merton to Hindu mystical teachings.³⁹ Déchanet's *Christian Yoga* (1960) is the first documentation of blending a yoga practice with Christian theology. Merton's and Déchanet's correspondence primarily focused on the mystical practices of William of Saint-Thierry, through whom Déchanet was drawn to yoga. In one letter from 1961, he described what's at stake in the practice of contemplation: it is "a matter of suffering and of accepting wholly a divine will that cannot be seen at all."⁴⁰ While not explicitly stated in Déchanet's letters, Merton was familiar with *Christian Yoga*, which he mentions in a June 1963 letter as "a reliable book."⁴¹

Along with the influence of these figures, Thomas Merton experimented with many religious traditions towards the end of his life, responding to Vatican II's call to ecumenism. He wrote an article including information from Taoism that explored the foundational teachings of the Taoist tradition in Asia.⁴² He wrote on Zen Buddhism in his books *Mystics and Zen Masters*,⁴³ *Zen and the Birds of Appetite*⁴⁴ and his posthumous *The Inner Experience*. He concluded that learning other faith practices is essential to increase one's own faith: "I will be a better Catholic, not if I can *refute* every shade of Protestantism, but if I can affirm the truth in it and still go further. . . . If I affirm myself as a Catholic merely by denying all that is Muslim, Jewish, Protestant, Hindu, Buddhist, etc., in the end I will find that there is not much left for me to affirm as a Catholic: and certainly no breath of the Spirit with which to affirm it."⁴⁵ For Merton, interreligious dialogue

offered an opportunity for Catholic self-reflection and community-building through multiple faiths. By exploring Asian religions, he unearthed a richness that many Christians failed to discover by remaining sheltered in their native Christianity (see *CCM* xii-xiii).

Now that this background has been set, it is crucial to note the few times Thomas Merton mentions yoga. He often simultaneously discusses Buddhism and Hinduism together (see for example *OSM* 213-14), though most of Merton's encounters with yoga are grounded in Buddhist thought.⁴⁶ The closest example of Merton mentioning yoga as a Hindu mystical practice is his brief note on reading “an article on Hindu mysticism by a Swami” which was “surprising [to him] how much Yoga has in common with St. Bernard – at least in the psychology of mysticism” (see *ES* 402). Merton also encountered Hinduism mysticism via a visiting swami. A few years later Merton recognized the intimate commonality between himself and Swami Shivaprem and wonders “if there are any educated yogis who are *not* deeply influenced by Christianity” (*TTW* 334). Yoga in his perspective would have heavily leaned toward Buddhism for the sheer fact that he admitted to being more interested in studying Buddhism than Hinduism (see *OSM* 236). In *Turning Toward the World*, there is one documentation of Hindu-Catholic interreligious dialogue initiated by Merton when he shared his knowledge of yoga to a young monastic aspirant. This knowledge was undoubtedly based in the definition of *ashtanga*, or eight-limbed yoga, as defined by Patanjali (see *TTW* 16). The previous confession of his partiality to Buddhism over Hinduism was dated roughly a month before his passing. One may wonder if he would have been more inclined to study Hinduism once he returned to Gethsemani after his visit in India.

While Merton had a small amount of documented experience with yoga in his lifetime, the understanding of Catholics who practice yoga are indebted to his work with Asian traditions. Christians who oppose the practice of yoga and Hindus who oppose the practice of secular yoga are both combatting the consumerism and self-consciousness in the world,⁴⁷ mirroring Merton's rejection of faith being separated from an individual's connection with society. Merton believes that mysticism is the bedrock of the Christian faith. In his perspective one can neither mask nor neglect its importance in the Christian tradition. Catholics who practice yoga have gone further by extracting mysticism from the bedrock of the Christian tradition and bringing it to the surface by engaging in this traditionally Eastern practice.

Merton would by default support Christians who practice yoga because they embody mystical contemplative practice and interreligious dialogue. Merton's familiarity and praise of *Christian Yoga*, the *Bhagavad Gita* and the *Yoga Sutras of Patanjali* allows Catholics the opportunity to explore Catholicism through yoga. This gateway led Thomas Ryan at the end of twentieth century to expand upon Christians practicing yoga through his initial publication, *Prayer of Heart and Body*, in which he describes Merton as a pioneer of contemplative prayer for all (see Ryan 4). Traces of Merton's effects on Christian yoga are mapped throughout the current Christians Practicing Yoga blog, an organization devoted to merging Christian and yogic philosophies.⁴⁸ Many other Christian bloggers such as “Bethel Yogi,”⁴⁹ “The Catholic Yogi” and “The Contemplative Life” praise Thomas Merton as an aid in the effective practices of yoga for physical and spiritual benefits. The three elements of mysticism, contemplative prayer and interreligious dialogue in Thomas Merton's work is the beginning of the rising practice of yoga to improve Catholic faith life.

1. Michelle Feder, “On Sunday Morning, It’s Time for Yoga Church,” *Seattle* 25.3 (2016) 107.
2. Hindu American Foundation, “Q and A Booklet”, available at: <https://www.hafsite.org/hinduism-essentials/q-and-a-booklet> [accessed 20 November 2019].
3. Many debate Christianizing yoga as a form of appropriation rather than appreciation: see Shreena Gandhi, “Yoga and the Roots of Cultural Appropriation”; available at <https://www.kzoo.edu/praxis/yoga/> [accessed: 17 May 2020]. For the author’s response, see: “Yoga Appreciation or Yoga Appropriation??”, available at: <https://www.bethelyogi.com/post/yoga-appreciation-or-yoga-appropriation>.
4. Candy Gunther Brown, “Christian Yoga: Something New Under the Sun/Son?” *Church History* 87.3 (2018) 659-60; subsequent references will be cited as “Brown” parenthetically in the text.
5. Pope Francis, “Hardened Hearts” (9 January 2015) par. 11; available at: http://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/cotidie/2015/documents/papa-francesco-cotidie_20150109_hardened-hearts.html [accessed 10 November 2019].
6. See Francis X. Clooney, *Learning Interreligiously: In the Text, in the World* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2018) 303-306.
7. Jean-Marie Déchanet, *Christian Yoga* (New York: Harper & Row, 1960); see also Dana Moore, “Jean-Marie Déchanet: The Father of Christian Yoga,” Christians Practicing Yoga Blog, June 24, 2019; available at: <https://www.christianspracticingyoga.com/christianity-and-yoga-blog/2015/6/24/jean-marie-dchanet-the-father-of-christian-yoga> [accessed 15 November 2019].
8. Thomas Ryan, *Prayer of Heart and Body: Meditation and Yoga as Christian Spiritual Practice* (New York: Paulist Press, 1995) 211; subsequent references will be cited as “Ryan” parenthetically in the text.
9. Heidi Schlumpf, “Yoga Makes Me a Better Catholic,” *National Catholic Reporter* (6 May 2016) par. 5.
10. Joe Hoover, “What’s the Deal with Ignatian Yoga: A Skeptical Jesuit Finds Out,” *America* 220.4 (8 Feb. 2019) 42. Other non-Catholic brands of Christian yoga exist, too, like Holy Yoga, YogaFaith and Yahweh Yoga.
11. See Thomas Merton, *The Seven Storey Mountain* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1948); subsequent references will be cited as “SSM” parenthetically in the text.
12. See Merton’s interactions with the Hindu monk Bramachari that were an important influence on his own conversion to Catholicism (SSM 191-98) and his interest in Patanjali’s *Yoga Sutras* as early as November 1949 (Thomas Merton, *Entering the Silence: Becoming a Monk and Writer: Journals, vol. 2: 1941-1952*, ed. Jonathan Montaldo [San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1996] 373 [subsequent references will be cited as “ES” parenthetically in the text]).
13. See *Nostra Aetate (Declaration on the Relationship of the Church to Non-Christian Religions)* in Walter M. Abbott, SJ, ed., *The Documents of Vatican II* (New York: Guild Press, 1966) 656-71; see also Helen R. F. Ebaugh, “The Revitalization Movement in the Catholic Church: The Institutional Dilemma of Power,” *Sociological Analysis* 52 (1991) 4.
14. See John Collins, “Where Are We Really Going? Always Home’: Thomas Merton and Hermann Hesse,” *Religion & the Arts* 16 (2012) 78-99; (subsequent references will be cited as “Collins” parenthetically in the text).
15. Thomas Merton, *A Course in Christian Mysticism: Thirteen Sessions with the Famous Trappist Monk*, ed. Jon M. Sweeney (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2017) xiii; subsequent references will be cited as “CCM” parenthetically in the text.
16. See SSM 191: “The life of the soul is not knowledge, it is love, since love is the act of the supreme faculty, the will, by which man is formally united to the final end of all his strivings – by which man becomes one with God.”
17. See Merton’s citation of Jung on Indian yoga in Thomas Merton, *Turning Toward the World: The Pivotal Years. Journals, vol. 4: 1960-1963*, ed. Victor A. Kramer (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1996) 237 (subsequent references will be cited as “TTW” parenthetically in the text).
18. See Harold G. Coward, *Yoga and Psychology: Language, Memory, and Mysticism*, SUNY Series in Religious Studies (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2002) 74; subsequent references will be cited as “Coward” parenthetically in the text.
19. Basavaraddi, “Yoga: Its Origin, History and Development,” Government of India: Ministry of External Affairs, 2015; available at: <https://www.mea.gov.in/in-focus-article.htm?25096/Yoga+Its+Origin+History+and+Development> [accessed 1 December 2019].
20. Elizabeth de Michelis, *A History of Modern Yoga* (London: Continuum, 2004) 218.
21. Yoga Swami Svatmarama, *Hatha Yoga Pradipika* (Opa-Locka: Aquarian Press, 1992) 15-16.
22. Thomas Merton, Preface to Denis Rutledge, *In Search of a Yogi* (New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 1963) vii-xii; rpt. *The Merton Annual* 23 (2010) 13-19.

23. See Thomas Merton, *The Road to Joy: Letters to New and Old Friends*, ed. Robert E. Daggi (New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 1989) 142-43 (8/11/1938 letter to Robert Lax); Thomas Merton, *The Other Side of the Mountain: The End of the Journey. Journals, vol. 7: 1967-1968*, ed. Patrick Hart (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1998) 103 (subsequent references will be cited as “OSM” parenthetically in the text); “The Significance of the *Bhagavad-Gita*,” in Thomas Merton, *The Asian Journal*, ed. Naomi Burton Stone, Brother Patrick Hart and James Laughlin (New York: New Directions, 1973) 348-53.
24. Thomas Merton, *Witness to Freedom: Letters in Times of Crisis*, ed. William H. Shannon (New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 1994) 166.
25. *ES 373*; and 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) 310 (subsequent references will be cited as “SS” parenthetically in the text).
26. See Stephen Mitchell, *Bhagavad Gita: A New Translation* (New York: Harmony Books, 2000) 144-48.
27. Patanjali, *Yoga Sutra of Patanjali* (CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform, 2015) 4; this version includes commentary on the original sutras.
28. Thomas Merton, *Seeds of Contemplation* (New York: New Directions, 1949); subsequent references will be cited as “SC” parenthetically in the text.
29. Thomas Merton, *New Seeds of Contemplation* (New York: New Directions, 1961); subsequent references will be cited as “NSC” parenthetically in the text.
30. Thomas Merton, *Contemplation in a World of Action* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1971) 375.
31. Thomas Merton, *The Inner Experience: Notes on Contemplation*, ed. William H. Shannon (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 2003) 25; see also Francis X. Clooney, “Thomas Merton’s Deep Christian Learning across Religious Borders,” *Buddhist-Christian Studies* 37.1 (2017) 49-64 (subsequent references will be cited as “Clooney, ‘Christian Learning’” parenthetically in the text).
32. In an October 26, 1957 journal entry he did link what he called “pranayanas” to contemplation (SS 129), though this is not solely a part of yogic traditions.
33. See Jane Ferguson, “Centering Prayer as a Healing Response to Everyday Stress: A Psychological and Spiritual Process,” *Pastoral Psychology* 59.3 (2010) 306; subsequent references will be cited as “Ferguson” parenthetically in the text.
34. “History of Contemplative Outreach”; available at: <https://www.contemplativeoutreach.org/history> [accessed 1 December 2019].
35. See Josephina Fernandez, “Centering Prayer and Embodied Contemplative Practices – My Experience,” Contemplative Outreach, Voices of Community; available at: <https://www.contemplativeoutreach.org/article/centering-prayer-and-embodied-contemplative-practices-%E2%80%93-my-experience> [accessed 1 December 2019].
36. See “Events”; available at: <https://www.contemplativeoutreach.org/listing> [accessed 1 December 2019].
37. Merton had plans to meet him while in India though this did not happen (see OSM 235).
38. Judson B. Trapnell, “Catholic Contemplative Engagement with India in the Life and Theological Thought of Jules Monchanin SAM, Henri Le Saux OSB and Bede Griffiths OSB Cam,” *One in Christ* 52.1 (2018) 47; subsequent references will be cited as “Trapnell” parenthetically in the text.
39. Déchanet specifies that he is referencing yoga through its Hindu origins in Chapter 3 of *Christian Yoga*.
40. “La contemplation ici est affaire de souffrance a d’acception entière d’une volonté divine qu’on ne voit point!” (trans. Dana Moore). Though Merton’s letters to Déchanet are apparently no longer extant, Déchanet’s letters to Merton are preserved in the archives of the Thomas Merton Center [TMC] at Bellarmine University, Louisville, KY. Thanks to Center Director Dr. Paul M. Pearson for providing copies of these letters.
41. Thomas Merton, *The School of Charity: Letters on Religious Renewal and Spiritual Direction*, ed. Patrick Hart (New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 1990) 177.
42. “Christian Culture Needs Oriental Wisdom,” in Thomas Merton, *Selected Essays*, ed. Patrick F. O’Connell (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2013) 102-12.
43. Thomas Merton, *Mystics and Zen Masters* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1967).
44. Thomas Merton, *Zen and the Birds of Appetite* (New York: New Directions, 1968).
45. Thomas Merton, *Conjectures of a Guilty Bystander* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1966) 129.
46. He is particularly influenced by Evans-Wentz’s *Tibetan Yoga and Secret Doctrines* (see OSM 206).
47. See Andrea R. Jain, “Who Is to Say Modern Yoga Practitioners Have It All Wrong?: On Hindu Origins and Yogaphobia,” *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 82.2 (June 2014) 456.

48. See Christians Practicing Yoga; available at: <http://www.christianspracticingyoga.com/who-we-are> [accessed 5 October 2020].
49. This is the author's blog, available at: <https://www.bethelyogi.com/>