From Thomas Merton's "Contemplation" to Ignatius of Loyola's "Contemplation to Obtain Love": A Personal Prayer Journey

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Foreword

Frequently I give workshops on aspects of spirituality. In a recent workshop entitled "Deepening Personal Prayer" I heard myself telling the participants that I came to an understanding of Ignatian prayer, particularly his Contemplation to Obtain Love,[1] through an understanding of Thomas Merton's understanding of contemplation. A workshop participant suggested I might write my reflections.[2] Hence these reflections are autobiographical. I am reflecting on my own prayer journey; I cannot presume to speak for anyone else. Perhaps I am writing my "confessions."

Autobiographical Background

As a Jesuit priest and a university professor I teach, write and lecture on Christian spirituality. My primary mentor for personal prayer has been Thomas Merton. For some this may seem scandalous. Ought not a Jesuit's primary prayer mentor be Ignatius Loyola and the prayer methods enshrined in his *Spiritual Exercises*? Yet I must acknowledge that Merton has been the dominant influence in my approach to personal prayer. More accurately it was Merton's approach to contemplation that ultimately gave me my entrée to Ignatius' Contemplation to Obtain Love.

From 1969 to 1972 I did graduate studies in theology which concluded with a dissertation involving Thomas Merton and Abraham Maslow. Writing the dissertation gave me the opportunity to grasp intellectually Merton's approach to spirituality, especially contemplation; I knew little about him before. But it is also important to note that during my graduate studies I simultaneously became interested in Abraham Maslow's self-actualization psychology, especially in his approach to religious experiences which he calls "peak experiences." My dissertation compared

Merton and Maslow in their approaches to religious experience (see note 18).

Having concluded my degree I began university teaching. I discovered that many aspects of Merton's thought made sense in conjunction with my personal experience so I gradually began appropriating his spiritual synthesis and using his language to name my own experiences. Indeed Merton became my primary guide as I began teaching university spirituality courses.

Why did I use Merton and not Ignatius as my primary spiritual guide? I entered the Society of Jesus in 1955. During the nineteen-fifties and sixties we Jesuits were indoctrinated into a Jesuit spirituality characteristic of the pre-Vatican II period. The indoctrination focused on guidelines for daily living and guidelines for personal prayer. The guidelines for daily living centered on obedience to the external laws and rules of the Society of Jesus. Since these laws and rules were the will of God the ideal goal of spirituality presented to us was perfect conformity with them: "You keep the rules and the rules will keep you." Additionally, since the will of the superior was also the will of God the indoctrination focused on perfect conformity to his will also. I can even remember applying the obedience principle to the type of haircut we received. It is not an exaggeration to say that my formation introduced me to a law-centered spirituality. Even now I can recall experiencing anxiety which was often accompanied by migraine headaches because of my inability to observe these guidelines fully.

The guidelines for daily prayer focused on the Ignatian methods of meditation and contemplation found in the *Spiritual Exercises*. We were given Jesuit-authored meditation books that presented scriptural passages for each day of the year; we were instructed to focus on the texts using memory, imagination, understanding and will in order to extract insights. We prayed for fifty minutes each morning beginning at 5:30. I found these early morning periods very difficult and did not look forward to them. They seemed totally irrelevant to my life; I regularly experienced distraction, boredom and sleep.

Please note that these approaches are no longer dominant in Jesuit formation. Vatican II invited religious orders to renew their spirituality according to the original charism of their founders. We Jesuits have responded fully and have rediscovered the authentic Ignatian spirituality. The theme of my reflections centers

on how my Merton orientation led me, eventually, to an authentic understanding of Ignatian spirituality, especially Ignatian prayer.

The Holy Spirit and Merton

Before personally appropriating Merton's spirituality, however, and subsequently Ignatius', I was given a great grace: the realization of the centrality of the Holy Spirit in all Christian spirituality. That realization occurred through the study of the documents of Vatican II. Without these insights I doubt I could have internalized either Merton or Ignatius. The passages such as the following from the "Constitution on the Church" began to revolutionize my understanding of spirituality:

> When the work which the Father had given the Son to do on earth (cf. Jn. 17:4) was accomplished, the Holy Spirit was sent on the day of Pentecost in order that He might forever sanctify the Church and thus all believers would have access to the Father through Christ in the one Spirit (cf. Eph. 2:18). . . .The Spirit dwells in the Church and in the hearts of the faithful as in a temple (cf. 1 Cor. 3:16; 619). In them he prays and bears witness to the fact that they are adopted sons (cf. Gal.4:6; Rom. 8:15-16 and 26). The Spirit guides the Church into the fullness of truth (cf. Jn. 16:13) and gives her a unity of fellowship and service.... He furnished and directs her with various gifts, both hierarchical and charismatic, and adorns her with the fruits of His grace (cf. Eph. 4:11-12; 1 Cor. 12:4; Gal. 5:22). [3]

Intellectually, I had always understood that the Holy Spirit is our sanctifier: the Father creates, the Son redeems, the Holy Spirit sanctifies. However, I had never grasped that the indwelling of the Spirit had actual concrete effects in daily life and daily prayer. Now Vatican II was teaching that the Spirit dwells in the Church and that we are the Church; therefore the Spirit dwells in us and not only in the hierarchy! Now I began asking about the concrete effects of this indwelling. Very soon I made the link between the Holy Spirit and daily living and daily prayer.

Merton provided the occasion for my recognizing for the first time the role of the Spirit in daily prayer. In 1975 I published an article entitled "Personal Prayer: Contemporary Themes."[4] The themes pulled together my insights on praying and attempted to articulate this renewed understanding using Merton's language.

The article was a significant milestone on my own prayer journey. It was Merton who gave me the words to enshrine my experience. And I do think I was faithful to Merton. The five themes treat were: Prayer as Letting the Spirit Speak, as an Expression of the Whole Self, as an Experience of the Whole Self, as the Discovery of God in the Depths of the Self, and as Resting in the Lord.

The first theme, Prayer as Letting the Spirit Speak, is the most significant. The subsequent themes are simply elaborations. The theme reflects on Paul's famous passage in *Romans*:

> The Spirit too helps us in our weakness for we do not know how to pray as we ought; but the Spirit himself makes intercession for us with groanings that cannot be expressed in speech. He who searches hearts knows what the Spirit means, for the Spirit intercedes for the saints as God himself wills (Rom. 8:26-27).[5]

Since Merton died in 1968, most of his writing pre-dated Vatican Council II 's reappropriation of the role of the Holy Spirit in Christian life. Yet all Merton's writing assumes this presence of the Holy Spirit, and frequently Merton does incorporate Holy Spirit language. Let the following Merton quote stands for all his passages that explicitly cite the role of the Holy Spirit in personal prayer.

> It can therefore be said that the aim of mental prayer is to awaken the Holy Spirit within us, and to bring our hearts into harmony with His voice, so that we allow the Holy Spirit to speak and pray within us, and lend Him our voice and our affections that we may became, as far as possible, conscious of His prayer in our hearts.[6]

Why was my article enshrining Merton's insights revolutionary for me? Very simply, I had a Pelagian understanding of prayer. All my life I had assumed that praying well was a result of my hard work. In prayer, I made efforts to avoid distractions and focus on the scriptural texts and to use my memory, understanding, will and imagination to produce suitable thoughts, insights, images and affections about the Lord. When I did pray well—experience suitable insights and affections—I attributed it to the conscientious use of my faculties. I have to confess that the understanding of Ignatian prayer I had developed during my years of formation as a Jesuit seemed to reinforce this approach. In any

case, I didn't begin intellectually questioning seriously this theology until my study of Merton.

Now Merton—and Saint Paul and Vatican Council II—are saying that prayer is the work of the Spirit!

I should note in passing that Merton also provided my first insights into the role of the Holy Spirit in daily life. The transformation of our hearts by the Holy Spirit in contemplation flowed out into our daily life, transforming our actions. I recall being struck by Merton's image of the spring and the stream.

> Action and contemplation now grow together into one life and one unity. They become two aspects of the same thing. Action is charity looking outward to other men, and contemplation is charity drawn inward to its own divine source. Action is the stream, and contemplation is the spring. The spring remains more important than the stream, for the only thing that really matters is for love to spring up inexhaustibly from the infinite abyss of Christ and of God.[7]

I began to realize that the "spring" for all goodness is the Holy Spirit. Actions are holy to the degree they are transformed by the Holy Spirit. Merton's reflections on the "true self" versus the "false self" were central. I realized that true understanding of the self acknowledges the role of the Holy Spirit; any false understanding does not.

> Every one of us is shadowed by an illusory person: a false self. This is the man that I want myself to be but who cannot exist, because God does not know anything about him. And to be unknown of God is altogether too much privacy. My false and private self is the one who wants to exist outside the reach of God's will and God's love—outside of reality and outside of life. And such a self cannot help but be an illusion.[8]

These insights of Thomas Merton about the role of the Holy Spirit in prayer and in daily life led to a profound reconsideration of my attitude to spirituality. I began to realize that my entire understanding of spirituality flowed from erroneous cultural assumptions of the relationship between myself and God. I, erroneously, saw myself as initiating all good actions in order to please God and so be rewarded by God for my fidelity. Merton helped me realize that, in reality, God through the Holy Spirit initiates all good within us and we in turn respond to the Spirit, not only in per-

sonal prayer but also in daily life: "I am the vine; you are the branches; without me you can do nothing."

These insights led me to articulate two models of the self which I dubbed the "Western Model" and the "Scriptural Model." The Western Model accepted my erroneous cultural assumptions and ignored the role of the Holy Spirit; the Scriptural Model challenged these cultural assumptions and acknowledged the centrality of the Holy Spirit.

The year 1975 was a watershed in my personal appropriation of Christian spirituality. Merton's approach, reinforced by Vatican Council II's theology of the Holy Spirit, had revolutionized my understanding of spirituality. I could hardly believe what I was discovering on the role of the Holy Spirit. Yet it was clearly the teaching of the New Testament echoed throughout history by the formal teaching of the Church, and most recently by Vatican Council II, especially in its Dogmatic Constitution on the Church. My excitement spilled over into dozens of articles and eventually into three books.[9]

Merton and Contemplation

Though I resonate with Merton's entire spiritual synthesis, one of its most attractive aspects is his approach to contemplation. I have to confess that though I had an intellectual grasp of the concept of contemplation while writing my dissertation it was not until I began university teaching in 1972 that I began to recognize contemplation in my own experience, and consequently was able to help others identify it in theirs. His approach was entirely new for me. It became key in providing the link to Ignatius' "Contemplation for Obtaining Love."

When I began university teaching I was assigned to teach a course on mysticism in the graduate theology program, since I had done a dissertation on Merton. Naturally enough contemplation emerged as a central concept and I used Merton as my guide. The opening chapters of *New Seeds of Contemplation* provide Merton's best descriptions of contemplation. His reflections transformed my understanding.

I learned that contemplation is the human being fully functioning. It is not limited to special types of people, such as cloistered monks and nuns.

> 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. It is spiritual wonder. It is spontaneous awe at the sacredness of life, of being. It is gratitude for life, for awareness and for being.[10]

I learned that contemplation can happen anywhere and anytime and need not be restricted to formal prayer periods and to specifically religious topics. Indeed I noted that most of Merton's own experiences seemed to happen through creation and daily events.

> Hence contemplation is a sudden gift of awareness, an awakening to the Real within all that is real. A vivid awareness of infinite Being at the roots of our own limited being. An awareness of our contingent reality as received, as a present from God, as a free gift of love. This is the existential contact of which we speak when we use the metaphor of being "touched by God."[11]

I learned that contemplation is really not the result of strenuous human effort to pray well using memory, understanding, will and imagination but, rather, comes most unexpectedly as a gift when we are relaxed and centered in God's presence.

> It is awakening, enlightenment and the amazing intuitive grasp by which love gains certitude of God's creative and dynamic intervention in our daily life. Hence contemplation does not simply "find" a clear idea of God and confine Him within the limits of that idea, and hold Him there as a prisoner to Whom it can always return. On the contrary, contemplation is carried away by Him into His own realm, His own mystery and His own freedom.[12]

I learned that contemplation is an experience that can never adequately be put into words. Merton couldn't be clearer: contemplation is not thinking. It is not a function of the self that thinks rationally and logically. Merton illustrates his insight by contrasting contemplation with the *cogito ergo sum* ("I think therefore I am") of Descartes.

> For the contemplative there is no *cogito* ("I think") and no *ergo* ("therefore") but only SUM, I AM. Not in the sense of a futile assertion of our individuality as ultimately real, but in the

> humble realization of our mysterious being as persons in whom God dwells, with infinite sweetness and inalienable power.[13]

I learned that contemplation is a knowing of God that occurs through an intuition into reality that happens when the circumstances are conducive and God gives the gift. Merton notes that the more objectively and scientifically we try to analyze contemplation the more we empty it of its real content, for the experience of contemplation is beyond verbalization and rationalization.

> The "I" that works in the world, thinks about itself, observes its own reactions and talks about itself is not the true "I" that has been united to God in Christ. It is at best the vesture, the mask, the disguise of that mysterious and unknown "self" whom most of us never discover until we are dead.[14]

He concludes that "The only way to get rid of misconceptions about contemplation is to experience it."[15]

So even while writing my dissertation I began asking myself whether I had ever had this amazing intuitive awareness of God's presence in my life. I concluded that I had not. I assumed these experiences were present only in people like Merton who were called to live cloistered contemplative lives in monasteries. I assumed they were not present in the lives of active Christians living in the world like myself.

However, during my graduate studies I took courses in the psychology of Abraham Maslow. I was interested especially in his theory on religious experiences which he calls "peak experiences."[16] Maslow describes the characteristics of peak experiences in an appendix entitled "Religious Aspects of Peak Experiences":

> -it is quite characteristic in peak experiences that the whole universe is perceived as integrated and unified whole; to have a clear perception that the universe is all of a piece and that one has his place in it can be so profound and shaking an experience that it can change the person's character.
>
> -there is a tremendous concentration of a kind that does not normally occur.
>
> -it can be relatively ego-transcending, self-forgetful, egoless, unselfish.
>
> -there is a very characteristic disorientation in time and space, or even the lack of consciousness of time and space.

-the world is seen only as beautiful, good, desirable, worthwhile and is never experienced as evil or undesirable.

-emotions as wonder, awe, reverence, humility, surrender, and even worship before the greatness of the experience are often reported.[17]

I was fascinated by Maslow's descriptions of peak experiences and his observations that healthy persons normally do experience them. So I began asking myself even while writing my dissertation whether I had these experiences. I concluded that I did. I noted four circumstances occasioning my peak experiences: 1) solitude in natural beauty, especially by oceans or mountains; 2) encounters with close friends; 3) satisfaction during or after effective spirituality presentations; 4) realization of God's love during morning prayer.

This was the first time in my life that I distinguished my ordinary daily experiences from my peak experiences. In retrospect, naming these peak experiences and distinguishing them from my ordinary daily thinking was an important first step toward recognizing contemplation in my life. However at no time did I interpret these experiences as religious, except for the ones occurring during formal prayer, nor did I identify them with Merton's understanding of contemplation.

However, when I began reflecting on my experiences while teaching university courses on mysticism my interpretation of these experiences changed. I began acknowledging similarities between Maslow's peak experiences and Merton's contemplation—always, of course, understanding that the experiences were gifts of the Holy Spirit. I soon concluded I was being "touched by God" in a way not only fulfilling Maslow's criteria for peak experiences but also Merton's criteria for contemplation.

Ignatius of Loyola and the Contemplation to Obtain Love

When the time came to choose a dissertation topic I was drawn toward reflecting on religious experience using Maslow's peak experiences. The chair of my department suggested I compare Maslow with a Christian approach. Since I was a Jesuit, he suggested I use Ignatius of Loyola. I discarded this suggestion immediately because of my negative attitude toward Ignatian prayer. Even though I had been living the Jesuit vocation for almost twenty years before writing my dissertation, I had never been attracted to

any of the Ignatian methods of prayer. In 1970 dissertations on Merton were in vogue so I chose to use Merton instead. My dissertation compared Maslow and Merton in their approaches to religious experience.[18]

Why did I summarily reject Ignatius' approach? I was still carrying very negative attitudes toward Ignatian prayer developed in my Jesuit formation. The methods presented were all thinking-centered. I found these methods tedious. Most did not connect to my life and so did not engage me. But I did remain conscientious in using these approaches for the first nine years of my Jesuit life—I knew no other method to fill up the time allotted for daily meditation. I should note that I was familiar with Ignatius' Contemplation to Obtain Divine Love but I saw it then as simply an elaboration of the same Ignatian methods that had not been working for me.

Fortunately my understanding and practice of personal prayer and contemplation changed; this was radically affected by two breakthroughs. The first breakthough occurred long before I was ever familiar with Merton's approach to contemplation; the second after I arrived at the university and I had begun teaching courses in mysticism.

The first breakthrough occurred nine years after I entered the Jesuits. I was assigned to teach at a mission for Native Americans the Jesuits ran in South Dakota. Life there was very difficult. Each day we young non-ordained Jesuit teachers arose at 5:00 A.M. and spent an hour in personal prayer in the community chapel, with the mission superior kneeling behind us. I conscientiously attempted to use the Ignatian methods of prayer I had been taught. The time was usually uneventful for me, due to tiredness, cold, and lack of interest in the topics I was praying over using the meditation books.

Life at the mission was also very difficult and often very frustrating. Never in my life had I experienced so many personal challenges both in my Jesuit community life and in my ministry. The students showed little interest in the religion courses I was teaching, not to mention the daily mass program and other activities I ran. I was very discouraged and even began wondering whether I had chosen the right vocation for my life.

However, very soon after I arrived at the mission I began taking walks alone at night down the remote country road late to pour out my discouragement to the Lord. I had never felt so lonely,

so frustrated, so unappreciated—and I let the Lord know. All alone under a star-lit sky in the middle of nowhere I unloaded my frustrations to the Lord, often crying out loud.

These walks stabilized me; I looked forward to them and would not miss them if at all possible. Frequently after having poured out my troubles, I experienced a profound stillness and peace in the pitch darkness under the starry skies. Indeed, looking back now I can recognize that I was being "touched by the Lord" in a way fulfilling Merton's description of contemplation. I regularly left the walks energized, determined to continue to serve the Lord, even in that difficult situation. My encounters with the Lord made it all worthwhile.

Initially, however, I did not consider these walks personal prayer—they were surely not the Ignatian prayer I was supposed to be doing.

Then the superior left for a month and no one monitored the 5:30 A.M. meditation hour. I needed sleep so badly that I decided to stay in bed, skip meditation, and get up in time for 6:30 mass. But soon my conscience began to bother me. I had been told that daily meditation was the most important part of our day, and I was skipping it. But one day during this period I had the realization that I was not skipping daily prayer; I was doing it at night walking down the road!

From that moment on my attitude toward personal prayer changed. Prayer did not have to be a tedious reflection from a meditation book on some aspect of scripture using memory, understand, will and imagination. Simply being with the Lord and allowing Him to touch me wherever I was in my life was prayer. I wasn't sure whether theologians would agree with me—and this wasn't the "Ignatian prayer" I was taught—so I kept my ideas to myself. But it was working for me so I continued it. My first breakthrough taught me that my daily life was the best starting point for my daily prayer.

My second breakthrough occurred several years after I began teaching university courses on mysticism—I was, of course, familiar with Merton's approach to contemplation. I learned that the daily prayer I had been accustomed to doing since my time at the mission was not only genuine prayer but indeed genuine Ignatian prayer. My previous understanding of Ignatian prayer confining it to the use of memory, understanding, imagination and will flowing from reflection on scripture passages was too lim-

ited. Though these methods were indeed appropriate for retreatants making the thirty-day Spiritual Exercises, they were not as appropriate for regular daily prayer. I was relieved to discover that Ignatian prayer ought not be identified solely with them.

It happened this way. Sometime in the late nineteen-seventies—I do not remember the exact year—I was ending my annual eight-day retreat using the prescribed Contemplation to Obtain Divine Love. Ignatius presents this Contemplation as a concluding prayer experience of his thirty-day Spiritual Exercises; it is frequently used also for eight-day retreats. His two preliminary observations are important: first, love is manifested more by deeds than by words, and, second, the lover shares with the beloved all that he or she has. We are instructed to stand before the Lord and ask for interior knowledge of how much God the Lover has shared with us the beloved. First Ignatius asks us just to recall all gifts received through creation, redemption and even individual personal gifts. Then Ignatius directs us to reflect on how God dwells in these gifts and sustains them in existence, giving life to plants, sensation to animals, intelligence to humans—and "making me his temple, since I am created as a likeness and image of the Divine Majesty."[19] Further, Ignatius suggests we reflect on how God not only creates and sustains these gifts but actually labors and works for us through them and even manifests Infinite power and beauty in some way through each created gift. The purpose of these reflections: to be stirred to a profound gratitude that we may better love and serve the Lord.

I had always understood that this prayer should focus on the high points of my relationship with Jesus and stir me to be grateful for blessings, such as faith, redemption, vocation, daily graces to be faithful to my calling for yet another year. But then I found myself being moved in a different direction. I began asking what was the greatest blessing of the past year for which I was grateful. The answer surprised me. It was a specific and moving relationship with a sophomore student.

The student had lost his father in high school but never permitted himself to grieve because as the oldest boy he wanted to be strong for his mother, sisters and younger brothers. One day after class he followed me to my office, eyes red, but said nothing was wrong. Next class he also followed me to my office, eyes red, and finally broke down and told me about his father's death, acknowledging for the first time to another person his great loss. I remained

his confidant throughout the year as he continued to share his personal and family concerns; we grew close. But the next year another tragedy struck the family: in a freak accident, his sister died. At his suggestion his mother asked me to do the funeral. This nineteen year old was now attempting to cope with two great losses. The coping involved alcohol. So not long after his sister's funeral he was arrested for driving while intoxicated, his second driving-under-the-influence arrest. At his court hearing a compassionate judge, a graduate from our law school, asked if he knew any Jesuits on campus that might serve as his probation officer. So he came by my office to ask if I would be his probation officer—and his father!

What was the greatest gift God had given me this year? A young student. All the blessings of creation and redemption and my vocation came together for me as I reflected upon our relationship the past two years. Effortlessly I recognized God's gift to me in this student. Effortlessly I was grateful for God's creating, sustaining and laboring through each of us – laboring especially through the power of the Holy Spirit within us to draw us together in love. It was all here: the blessings of creation and redemption and my vocation.

I realized that my experiences of being "touched by God" through this student throughout these two years frequently fulfilled not only Maslow's criteria for peak experiences but also Merton's criteria for contemplation.

And I realized that this was also genuine Ignatian prayer, indeed, an excellent example of Ignatius' Contemplation to Obtain Love! I began realizing that the prayer rhythm I discovered at the mission was not only genuine prayer but was even Ignatian prayer because it flowed from daily life. I had too narrowly identified Ignatian prayer with the formal meditation and contemplation methods presented in the texts of the *Spiritual Exercises*. Indeed, Ignatius presents, even in the *Spiritual Exercises*, a much more comprehensive approach to prayer, one that arises naturally from ordinary daily life—the Contemplation for Obtaining Love.

My Debt to Merton

As I conclude my "confessions," I realize that I am indebted to Thomas Merton in two inestimable ways. First, I am indebted to Merton for giving me a theological foundation for revitalizing my

understanding and practice of personal prayer and contemplation.

What did I learn from Merton?

I learned that daily prayer is not primarily a religious obligation superimposed on our nature but rather a natural spontaneous expression of our truest self. Until Merton, I viewed formal prayer most often as a religious duty, a duty to which I was committed but did not relish.

I learned that normally prayer is easy, requiring being before the Lord honestly and allowing the Holy Spirit to bring us into communion—not unlike being with a friend. Prayer does not have to be a strenuous attempt to concentrate on scripture using memory, understanding, will and imagination.

I learned that the beauty of creation and the ordinary events of daily life are the best starting points for daily prayer, rather than scriptural texts unrelated to daily life. Merton's prayers as recorded in his journals are usually occasioned by just such experiences of creation or the human situation.

I learned that normally the best way to pray is to reduce personal efforts of thinking, willing and imagining and to allow ourselves to be present to the Holy Spirit, listening to this voice rising up within us. This voice often leads to communion with Jesus: "My sheep hear my voice."

I learned that prayer is enjoyable because communion with God often flows over to deep peace and well-being. And I learned—to my great surprise—that this communion sometimes becomes contemplation. And I learned that these contemplative moments happen outside of my formal prayer time as well as during it. I discovered that my richest human experiences were also religious experiences—no separation between the sacred and the secular.

Second, I am indebted to Merton for bringing me "home" to Ignatius. I realize that my off-hand remark about Merton's approach to contemplation leading me to Ignatius' "Contemplation to Obtain Love" was accurate. Primarily through Merton's reflections on contemplation I have "come home" to Ignatian prayer and contemplation. I should note that by the mid nineteen-eighties I was squarely in the Ignatian camp, owning my own Ignatian spirituality and communicating it to others.

Observations of Ignatius at prayer, like the following recollection from one of Ignatius' first companions, assure me I'm on the right track.

> At night he would go up on the roof of the house, with the sky there up above him. He would sit there quietly, absolutely quietly. He would take his hat off and look up for a long time at the sky. The he would fall on his knees, bowing profoundly to God. Then he would sit on a little bench because the weakness of his body did not allow him to take any other position. He would stay there bareheaded and without moving. And the tears would begin to flow down his cheeks like a stream, but so quietly and so gently that you heard not a sob nor a sigh nor the least possible movement of this body.[20]

I ask myself why this journey took so long. I've always known intellectually that "finding God in all things" and being "contemplatives in action" were hallmarks of Ignatian spirituality and prayer. I recognize now that I was blocked from grasping this dimension of Ignatius by invalid assumptions flowing both from my pre-Vatican II orientation and from my early Jesuit formation. I needed someone to address these assumptions directly. In God's Providence Thomas Merton was that person.

And I realize now that Merton, Ignatius and I are brothers in prayer and contemplation, seeking God in daily lives and in creation—in all things!

Notes

1. Ignatius presents the "Contemplation to Obtain Love" as the concluding spiritual exercise of his thirty-day retreat. See George E. Ganss, *The Spiritual Exercises of Saint Ignatius: A Translation and Commentary* (St. Louis: Institute of Jesuit Sources, 1992), pp. 94-95.

2. The participant was Victor A. Kramer, ed.: *The Merton Annual: Studies in Culture, Spirituality and Social Concerns* (Louisville: Fons Vitae).

3. Walter M. Abbott, Editor, *The Documents of Vatican II* (New York: Guild Press, 1966), "Dogmatic Constitution on the Church," para. 4, p. 17.

4. "Personal Prayer: Contemporary Themes," *Review for Religious* (March 1975), pp. 256-265.

5. *The New American Bible* (New York: Thomas Nelson, 1970).

6. Thomas Merton, *Spiritual Direction and Meditation* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1960), p. 79.

7. Thomas Merton, *No Man Is an Island* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1955), p. 70.

8. Thomas Merton, *New Seeds of Contemplation* (New York: New Directions, 1961), p. 34.

9. Richard J. Hauser, *In His Spirit: A Guide to Today's Spirituality* (New York: Paulist Press, 1982); *Moving in the Spirit: Becoming a Contemplative in Action* (New York: Paulist Press, 1986); *Finding God in Troubled Times* (Chicago: Loyola Press, 2002).

10. *New Seeds of Contemplation*, p. 1.

11. *New Seeds of Contemplation*, p. 3.

12. *New Seeds of Contemplation*, p. 5.

13. *New Seeds of Contemplation*, p. 9.

14. *New Seeds of Contemplation*, p.7.

15. *New Seeds of Contemplation*, p. 6.

16. Abraham H. Maslow, *Religions, Values and Peak-Experiences* (New York: Viking Press, 1970). This book contains Maslow's theory on the relationship between peak experiences and religious experiences.

17. *Religions, Values and Peak Experiences*, Appendix A, pp. 59-68. Appendix contains twenty-five characteristics of peak experience. I have paraphrased six.

18. Richard J. Hauser, S.J., *The Value of Abraham H. Maslow's Personality Theory for Understanding the Approach to Christian Prayer in Selected Writings of Thomas Merton* (Ann Arbor, MI: University Microfilms, 1973).

19. *Spiritual Exercises*, p. 95. I have paraphrased Ganss' translation.

20. W. W. Meissner, S.J., *Ignatius of Loyola: The Psychology of a Saint* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992), p. 280.