Thomas Merton's World Discourse: Economic Globalization versus Religious Universality

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I rescue all who cling to me,
I protect whoever knows my name,
I answer everyone who invokes me,
I am with them when they are in trouble;
I bring them safety and honour.
I give them life, long and full,
and show them how I can save
(*Psalm* 91:14-16)

One of the main merits of Merton's literary impact is that it can greatly contribute to untying the knots and dilemmas of personal and social conflicts by providing ever new symbolic 'pray-grounds' for voicing, and therefore building, personal, communal, and value-bound, value-able modes of being, seeing and acting in our times. It is in this Trinitarian dynamics, at the root of the Christian notion of 'person,' where both criticism of selfishness and hope for true relatedness lie.

Many contemporary representatives of our civilization have unanimously advocated a spiritual revolution to stop warfare and the disintegration of our world. Merton's transformative metaphors may help us honour the best and most universal of our human civilization by bringing forth the most regenerative radiance from deep inside the heart of contemplation.

The following reflection attempts to address the contrasting discourses of Merton's universality – as conveyed in both his prose and poetry – and of economic globalization, 'a world without direction' which Ignacio Ramonet, director of *Le Monde Diplomatique*, has

graphically described as the PPII system, i.e., 'that which is planetary, permanent, immediate and immaterial' thus claiming the right to act in a god-like manner demanding submission, faith and new rituals.[1]

I

In his Millennium Lecture (*Time and Again: Poetry and the Millennium*), delivered at the University of Liverpool (22nd March 2000), Seamus Heaney concluded by highlighting the risk of our being blinded, rather than enlightened, by the glitter of the new information technologies. For him, poetry may act as a pin-card which, while letting us approach the dazzling mass of World Wide Web news and views, also prevents us from being merely bewildered by eclipsing novelties. 'Hold it up to reality and an image comes through,' he says, 'time and again, that allows us to see ourselves and the world we inhabit in a contemplatable light.'[2]

Merton devoted his monastic life to tracing back the radiance of yet another sun, an inner light which streams out from deep within the springs of contemplation and allows the human family access to the divine loving gaze which is the very foundation of the world and indeed, the stamp and breath of our human condition. Were we to love as we are loved, to see as we are seen, to create as we are created and to shine as we are being shone upon, as he discovered in Louisville, at the corner of Fourth and Walnut, there would be no more wars, no more self-deceptions, no more feelings of abandonment or scarcity.[3]

It is in the difference between these two lights that we may find Thomas Merton's crucial choice and the impulse for his radical leap of faith. Merton saw both his personal dilemmas as a young man and the painful contradictions of his own time articulated in Huxley's seminal work *Ends and Means* which, by his own appraisal, played a 'very great part' in his conversion.[4]

In the first chapter of his work, Huxley expressed his arguments in unambiguous terms:

> Technological advance is rapid. But without progress in charity, technological advance is useless. Indeed, it is worse than useless.'[5] How can this be possible? Perhaps we have been simply blinded by the brilliance of our technological might, a complex of means which have escalated to reach Promethean dimensions.[6]

Huxley continues:

> 'Good ends. . . can be achieved only by the employment of appropriate means. The end cannot justify the means, for the simple and obvious reason that the means employed determine the nature of the ends produced.'[7]

Obvious as it may look, it is in the forgetting of this basic axiological truth that we may largely find the dividing line between an idolatrous, insular, self-bound consciousness and the mind of the living, life-giving, loving and love-given Christ. In the same essay Aldous Huxley quotes Professor Whitehead who, in his *Religion in the Making*, suggests that 'religion is world loyalty' and sees a deep connection 'between universality and solitariness.'[8]

A person like Merton, who plunged into the depths of the world at large as well as into the abyss of his own heart, in solitude and in communion, can greatly contribute to facing global problems from a universal perspective which results from a life devoted to living 'in the company of the Trinity.'[9] Trinitarian relatedness is the very foundation of the Christian approach to self and other as 'person.' And it is this unique, specifically Christian trait, which paradoxically became for Merton the meeting point of saintly people from other religious traditions in their shared search for peace of mind and peace on earth. Thus, for instance, at a stage of monastic maturity Merton discovered 'in the "void" of Hui Neng [the Sixth Patriarch of Chinese Ch'an or Zen] a surprising Trinitarian structure' which for him meant 'inevitably a fulfilment in love.'[10]

This is indeed an unprecedented spiritual finding with enormous universal consequences at a time when economic globalization needs to be regulated by policies congenial with moral behaviour and planetary ethics.[11] Our contention is that these are to be nurtured by the sustained practice, and will develop as the natural outcome, of *contemplata tradere*, that is, they may become the ripe fruits of religious wisdom and contemplative awareness on a universal scale.

Acknowledging a Trinitarian foundation at the centre of another religion should give us enough reason for hope in the universality of the Gospel's promises.[12] In his seminal work, *Der dreiene Gott, Eine trinitarische Theologie*, theologian Gisbert Greshake defines God as relational and the Three Persons as three distinct yet inseparable relationships. Rather than an isolated, individual and objectified entity, a person is defined by his or her love and openness to the

radical Other as much as to the neighbouring others in a bond of communion. Similarly, better than the modern or postmodern 'I' defined by its power to think autonomously and instrumentally, from a Christian perspective, the 'I' can only be true to himself or herself by breaking its boundaries in an attempt to reach out towards 'you' and 'him/her,' thus becoming a 'we' whose way of thinking is de-centred and altruistic. The basic assumption is, therefore, not that 'I think' but that 'I believe in love,' which has a threefold meaning: 1) God loves me; 2) you are for me as important as I am to myself because I find the Lord in you; and 3) we want to love each other as He loved us. In short, we are one, and He is always in our midst. What is more, according to Greshake, this does not merely apply to the individual person but it also provides hermeneutical keys for other 'formations of unity' in the created world, such as cultures, religions and societies. This realization opens up new avenues of understanding, collaboration and dialogue within the great human family, a plural yet singular unity of love.[13]

In a similar vein, Raimon Panikkar defines the Trinity as a primordial human experience and as indeed the core of the whole of reality.

> There are not three realities: God, Man and the World. There is not one reality either: God, or Man or the World. Reality is cosmotheandric.[14]

In other words, Reality is intrinsically Trinitarian.

This preamble may perhaps better situate Merton's contemplative critique and the universality and poignancy of his writings against the background of today's 'millennial capitalism,' which the Comaroffs define as 'a capitalism that presents itself as a gospel of salvation,' a kind of 'Second Coming of Capitalism—of capitalism in its neoliberal, global manifestation,'[15]

Merton's articulation of his monastic experience, and his specific unmasking of idolatry throughout his work, can throw much light upon the belief-system which sustains today's economic globalization and its rationality. The term *globalization*, which was included for the first time in an American dictionary in 1961, has been recently defined by Joaquín Estefanía, former director of the Spanish national newspaper *El País*, as a process whereby national policies are becoming less important while international decisions, made far away from the citizens, are gaining predominance. This description deliberately seeks to reflect both the positive and the negative sides of it. However,

despite its benefits, there is growing concern about the fact that more and more things occur without the intervention of the people affected by them and important issues are decided without the say of those for whom they are designed.[16] Freedom to decide courses of action is being gradually replaced by a surrogate, fake freedom to choose material commodities. The praxis of citizenship is subtly but effectively replaced by the compulsive exercise of consumption.

It is thus not *globalization* as such which is seriously objected to but the evidence that so far its development has been predominantly financial. For it is this ambition, both virtual and material, freed from any political control or human regulation, which precisely imposes severe limits on a parallel and much needed spread of global justice, human rights and sustainable development. Only this complementary globalization can put a halt to the perverse consequences of irrational greed.[17]

At the heart of this 'structural' evil, Merton saw the artful machination of 'the father of lies' eroding the core of our spiritual consciousness and distorting our image and likeness of God. In an essay which served as an introduction to the letters of the twelfth century Cistercian Adam of Perseigne, Merton explains how St Bernard saw pride as leading us away from God to bring us, in return, 'to the feet of a false god, which is our own inordinate self-love.' For Merton, this falsity can only be given up when we see that it is false. 'No man will cling to something that he manifestly believes to be unreal,' he writes. After offering what we deem a most accurate diagnosis of the illness of our times, Merton provides us with this equally fair prognosis:

> Hence the constant need to be honest with ourselves, and to grapple with the "spirit of fiction" that is in our very blood itself, always ready to deceive us in the disguise of an angel of light.[18]

Globalization is today being overtly and covertly advocated by representatives of neoliberalism as an eschatological movement towards the definite unity and universality of the human race.[19] And who could resist such noble ends? Neither the possibility of being universally linked nor the virtual access to financial information available from anywhere in the world in real time can be denied. But this is precisely the disguise adopted by the *spiritus fictionis* in our days. Can technological connections or media communication, in all honesty, satisfy our thirst for genuine communion? Does instant access to any kind of information grant real wisdom? Could it be that

we are being seduced by the media and are becoming their prey instead of their masters?

The words of Aldous Huxley in his 1946 introduction to *Brave New World* bear overtones which are terribly familiar for us today: 'A really efficient totalitarian state would be one in which the all-powerful executive of political bosses and their army of managers control a population of slaves who do not have to be coerced, because they love their servitude.' And the strategies devised to this end partially mirror the numbing and dumbing climate of our own society: 'In conjunction with the freedom to daydream under the influence of dope and movies and the radio, [sexual freedom] will help to reconcile his subjects to the servitude which is their fate.'[20]

Similarly, in one of his best known essays Merton bluntly asked, 'Is love a package or a message?'[21] Isaiah's curse should shake us out of our all too-easy complacency: 'Woe to those who call evil good, and good evil, who substitute darkness for light, and light for darkness' (Isaiah 5:20).

Felix Wilfred and Jon Sobrino caution us against the feigned universality of capital and the centripetal unity of possessive individualism. Appealing as it may seem, financial globalization is a poor and dangerous substitute for the centrifugal unity of religions and their communal and relational universality, which, on the other hand, from a genuine Trinitarian perspective, could never allow for uniformity or syncretistic fusions and confusions.[22] The antidote of falsity is reality itself.[23] Merton viewed monastic life as either a school of charity or a school of reality since, for him, the terms love and reality are interchangeable. In the words of the Carmelite contemplative Father William McNamara:

> This is what it means to become the image and likeness of God: to develop the graced capacity we have for altruistic love relationships. God does not have a social life, a community, a trinity of persons. No one of the persons of the Trinity has or is anything in and by himself. Each one is entirely for the other and is constituted in being by eternal relatedness to the other. The Trinity is the altruistic love-life of God. We are truly human to the extent that we do in fact become, existentially and not just theoretically, the living image and likeness of God.[24]

Merton himself explains the delusory dynamics of self-aggrandizement as a failed approach to gain a status of reality, which cannot and indeed does not need to be conquered because it is pure gift.

Dr Robert Imperato, in his essay on Merton and Walsh concerning the person, aptly introduces a lengthy quotation of Merton to explain the crucial difference between an individual and a person:

> Psychologically, the individual is what is constructed by discrimination from all other individuals; the unique person is constituted by divine love.[25]

The quote in question is from *New Seeds of Contemplation*:

> People who know nothing of God and whose lives are centered on themselves, imagine that they can only find themselves by asserting their own desires and ambitions and appetites in a struggle with the rest of the world. They try to become real by imposing themselves on other people, by appropriating for themselves some share of the limited supply of created goods and thus emphasizing the difference between themselves and the other men who have less than they, or nothing at all.
>
> They can only conceive one way of becoming real: cutting themselves off from other people and building a barrier of contrast and distinction between themselves and other men. They do not know that reality is to be sought not in division but in unity, for we are members of one another.
>
> The man who lives in division is not a person but only an individual.

Former UNESCO general secretary Federico Mayor Zaragoza has recently written that we need to first acknowledge the fact that it is the spiritual poverty of a few which has been the cause of the material poverty of far too many.[26] Similarly, President of the Czech Republic Vaclav Havel has declared that the time has come to lift the Iron Curtain of the spirit:

> It is not enough to invent new machines, new regulations, new institutions. We must develop a new understanding of the true purpose of our existence on this earth ... Perhaps the way out of our current bleak situation could be found by searching for what unites the various religions...[27]

For his part, in response to the tragic events of September 11th and thereafter, Buddhist monk and Zen teacher Thich Nhat Hanh, whom Merton came to know and considered his 'brother,' wrote a circular letter inviting all readers to cultivate compassion as the way out of violence. His seems a spiritually intelligent commentary:

> We are all co-responsible for the making of violence and despair in the world by our way of living, of consuming and of handling the problems of the world. Understanding why this violence has been created, we will then know what to do and what not to do in order to decrease the level of violence in ourselves and in the world, to create and foster understanding, reconciliation and forgiveness.

Equally sensitive, and also universally applicable are Nobel Peace Prize Aung San Suu Kyi's commentaries, even if the context in which they were made was different:

> Truth is a very powerful weapon. People may not think so but it is very powerful. And truth – like anything that is powerful – can be frightening or reassuring, depending on which side you are on. If you are on the side of truth, it's very reassuring—you have its protection. But if you are on the side of untruth—then it's very frightening.[28]

And in reading about the fear which comes from 'unreality,' 'untruth' or 'the spirit of fiction,' we cannot but share Merton's alarm against the possibility of 'global suicide' in one of his incendiary essays whose plea is even more urgent today than when it was first published in 1962. At the end of *The Root of War is Fear* readers find the following statement and subsequent exhortation:

> Many men...have asked God for what they thought was "peace" and wondered why their prayer was not answered. They could not understand that it actually was answered. God left them with what they desired, for their idea of peace was only another form of war. The "cold war" is simply the normal consequence of our corruption of peace based on a policy of "every man for himself" in ethics, economics and political life. It is absurd to hope for a solid peace based on fictions and illusions! So instead of loving what you think is peace, love other men and love God above all. And instead of hating the people you think are warmongers, hate the appetites and the disorder in your own soul, which are the causes of war. If you love peace, then hate injustice, hate tyranny, hate greed—but hate these things in yourself, not in another.[29]

Not only the above mentioned people but many others are unanimously claiming the need for a global spiritual revolution, that is, a universal, yet at the same time absolutely personal, therefore relational, *metanoia* to prevent the destruction of our world. From the point of view of consciousness, this revolution would consist in the reversal and radical conversion of instrumental reason into a Trinitarian 'structure of thinking and feeling.' Here we are deliberately attempting to stretch Raymond Williams' appropriate categorization beyond its material confines from within the core of materiality, as it were.[30]

Consciousness cannot be abstracted from language. And Merton saw the crisis of language as both a symptom and an expression, the cause and the effect of a mindset ever prone to war. Interestingly for us, a few years after Merton's death, linguists George Lakoff and Mark Johnson wrote a most revealing study on the metaphors we live by in which they profusely disclosed how metaphors pervade our lives to the extent that our ordinary conceptual system is basically metaphorical. So much so that it governs our normal functioning to the most mundane details. 'The essence of metaphor,' they explained, 'is understanding and experiencing one thing in terms of another.'[31] And then, they added, acting according to the way we conceive things. They showed this systematically through examples taken from everyday speech, which still strike us for their very simplicity.

Even more shocking and provocative was a later paper by George Lakoff which was publicly presented at the University of Berkeley, California, on January 30, 1991 on 'the metaphor system used to justify war in the gulf' which began by directly claiming that 'metaphors can kill,' a provocative statement which he qualified in his conclusion as 'metaphors backed up by bombs can kill.' In this paper, Lakoff took as a case study the thought system evinced by the metaphors used in the discourse over whether to go to war in the Gulf. Let us take just one example of a loaded set of metaphors, for today they still serve as the main conceptual justification for the so-called economic globalization. These metaphors fall under the following umbrella heading: 'Rationality is the maximization of self-interest.' Lakoff explains some of the Protean corollaries of this implicit injunction in the context of the gulf situation: 'Since it is in the interest of every person to be as strong and healthy as possible, a rational state seeks to maximize wealth and military might.' Under this frame of thought, Lakoff discovers three very logical deductions: 1) 'violence can further self-interest,' 2) 'morality is a matter of accounting' and 3) 'a just war is thus a form of combat for the purpose of settling moral accounts.'

Lakoff adds nuances to these assumptions with further metaphorical scaffolding in case there could be any possible mind-gaps, as if even ellipsis itself has a role to play in the very working of the metaphor system which rules our way of thinking. For our purpose, we would like to simply call your attention now to the way the term 'person' has been used. The concept, as seen in this context, would clearly

correspond to what Merton called 'an individual,' that is, a measurable entity, a separate material body, a numbered subject, or an objectified human. However, it would never apply to a 'person' as regarded from a Trinitarian standpoint, that is, the uniquely interrelated play of freedoms which constitutes the reality, relationality, and indeed the charitable rationality and the ineffable beauty, goodness and truth of each and every loved-lovable-and-loving human being. The very fact that a person, in the real Christian sense, cannot but conceive self-interest as inclusive of the interest of the others, explains the miraculous and paradoxical condition of universality and uniqueness, the unity and differentiation of the human condition.

Christian humanism is built upon and depends on personal and communal dignity. Their very intertwining within a Trinitarian alliance shapes the extraordinary conviviality of humane life. Conversely, a real 'person' could never interpret 'interest' as just 'material wealth' for oneself, as if 'interest' were synonymous with mere individual possession or the accumulation of goods. On the other hand, a faithful Christian could not and should not interpret collective, or rather communal, strength as 'military might.' In the Gospel narratives, the kingdom of God was never compared to the Roman Empire. The blessing goes for the meek because, sadly enough, the powerful are too reluctant to accept whatever may be freely given. Certainly, the rationale of the metaphor system which governs the beatitudes runs counter-power-wise. Lakoff finished his case study by affirming that 'it is in the service of reality that we must pay more attention to the mechanisms of metaphorical thought.'[32]

This is what Merton himself had already tried to do in his 1968 prophetic piece of writing 'War and the Crisis of Language' in which he viewed 'the gap between words and actions' as a 'worldwide illness' and 'a universal malaise' affecting both the particular domains of war and politics in general, even religion. The same logic of power which justifies madness is made manifest, says Merton, in 'the language of escalation,' characterized by 'circularity,' oversimplification, ambiguity, 'self-enclosed tautological clichés,' 'double-talk,' 'banality and apocalypse,' 'self-righteous and doctrinaire pomposity' which, unfortunately, still plague the rhetoric of today's global power politics, only to hide, as Merton discovered, 'a massive death wish,' 'a total callousness and moral insensitivity, indeed a basic contempt for man.' And all of this to 'mask the ultimate unreason' of technological

strategy becoming an end in itself and leading the fascinated players into a maze which seems to call for self-destruction as its only desperate way out.[33]

We are coming full circle. What Robert Inchausti very appropriately termed Merton's 'American prophecy'[34] has largely outgrown the scope of the American dream. And what Merton announced as much as what he denounced about America for his fellow citizens is of universal import today. Thanks to him, nowadays the 'spirit of fiction' can be better seen everywhere for what it is, 'a father of lies,' a process of unreason, the mirror of death and, in the words of Indian writer Arundhati Roy, 'the end of imagination.'[35]

Indeed, we can see the worldwide spread of this falsity adopting the inflated guise of globalization every time the means (instruments, technologies, goods, commodities, devices and media of all sorts) become the ends; whenever war is madly advocated as the only way of achieving peace; when people are emptied of their freedom and their kinship and end up instead functioning as replaceable units in a production-consumption chain; every time busi-ness is ruled by self-ish-ness; whenever man is thought an 'island, entire of himself;' whenever financial benefit acts as the only driving force for personal or social change; when, caught by the birds of appetite and lost in the fog of unreality, we mock the living God and distort His image and likeness.

In contrast, Merton suggests:

> The Christian life is a return to the Father, the Source, the Ground of all existence, through the Son, the Splendor and the Image of the Father, in the Holy Spirit, the Love of the Father and the Son. And this return is only possible by detachment and "death" in the exterior self, so that the inner self, purified and renewed, can fulfil its function as image of the Divine Trinity [...] Christianity...is a return to the infinite abyss of pure reality...a recognition of ourselves as other Christs.[36]

A Trinitarian look at the world will doubtlessly make us share Merton's clear realization that 'the stranger we meet is no other than ourselves, which is the same as saying we find Christ in him.'[37]

The following story may perhaps illustrate, better than any further elaboration, the tiny but insurmountable distance which separates today's spurious economic globalization from religious universalism:

> A Zen master in deep samadhi visited heaven and hell after death. First he went to hell, where everyone was having dinner. They were all seated at long tables, facing one another. The tables were loaded with delicious food, but the chopsticks were over a meter in length, and try as they would, the people were unable to get the food into their mouths. There was a great commotion.
>
> Next, the master went to one of the heavens and he found the people also seated around tables loaded with delicious food, just as in hell. Here, too, the chopsticks were exceedingly long, but everyone was using them very naturally, putting the food into the mouths of the people across the table! They were all enjoying dinner, and the atmosphere was quiet and happy.[38]

II

The title of this conference, *The World In My Blood Stream: Thomas Merton's Universal Embrace*, is taken from one of Merton's love poems which seems appropriate to illustrate our reflection. This fine composition was written by a mature monk and poet who by the end of his life had somehow managed to solve his inner conflict between solitude and solidarity, contemplation and action, silence and writing. By the time he wrote the poem Merton seemed to have reached or to be on the verge of reaching a global and transcendental vision of reality beyond false divisions. Let us coin a neologism and call his compassionate look a 'contemplactive' gaze which mirrored and was conducive to the experience of universal love.

This sacred and unifying perception of life is in fact the underlying theme not only of this poem but of his whole poetic production. Needless to say that the unity alluded by Merton differs greatly from any of the notions fostered by the advocates of 'economic globalization' viewed as the current process of marketization of the world and the set of pseudo-theological arguments which seek to legitimate it.

In many of his writings, instead, Merton stoutly criticized this western 'unmitigated arrogance towards the rest of the human race.'[39] He fiercely denounced the apparently inherent drive of human beings to subject the 'other.' Strongly opposing this xenophobic inclination to wipe out all that is unfamiliar or interferes with our clear rationalizations, Merton saw the urge to re-create a political and poetical space wherein humanity could imagine new forms of consciousness and communal experience.

He envisioned the transformation of a world metaphorically built upon 'empires' into one thought of and felt as a 'dwelling' place and he charted a sacred geography where there would be no need to artfully justify any sort of personal or structural violence for the sake of power or gain over others. He invited us to recover our original unity in Christ's light, underlining the need to overcome division and warfare within ourselves and between people of different faiths. For, as he wrote,

> the deepest level of communication is not communication, but communion...we are already one. But we imagine that we are not. And what we have to recover is our original unity. What we have to be is what we are.'[40]

Merton's main concern throughout his life was to become what he really was and to listen to the Word incarnated within himself and his brother, a living presence between himself and the other.[41] He considered life as a process from birth to new birth through 'unbirth' and resurrection. In this most personal and universal agenda, the command of the Delphic oracle, 'know thyself,' plays a relevant role. Indeed, Merton encouraged us to transform our life into a journey towards the core of our 'true self,' the ground where one can hear one's true name pronounced and gain access to the mystery of creation, as given, and creativity, as giving.

Near the end of Merton's life, metaphorically experienced as a journey into the wisdom of love, on the 23rd March 1966, Father Louis met a nurse from St Joseph's Hospital (Louisville) who acted for him as a transparent mirror of his own authentic identity: 'You have come/bringing the truth I need,' he wrote then.[42] Merton dedicated *Eighteen Poems* to her. 'With the World in my Blood Stream' was written in April 1966, after surgery to his spine, and it is, in fact, the first poem he composed for her, inspired by the loneliness he felt when the student nurse left the hospital for the Easter holiday and flew to Chicago in order to see her fiancé.[43] According to Jim Forest's biography,[44] she received the lines during a meeting they had at a restaurant in Louisville on 26th April, where the monk confessed his love for her.

The poem shows some of the characteristics of Merton's latest poetry, rich with imagery, allusions and synaesthesias. The stanzas stand as a profound and solitary meditation on the authentic meaning of life by a poet who, after an unceasing search for unity and purity of

heart, had transcended his own solitude and was capable of embracing all cultural and religious differences in God's 'palace of nowhere.'[45]

The poem begins with a stream of musical metaphors,[46] which voice the poet's desolate situation after a surgical operation:

> I lie on my hospital bed
> Water runs inside the walls
> And the musical machinery
> All around overhead
> Plays upon my metal system
> My invented back bone
> Lends to the universal tone
> A flat impersonal song
> All the planes in my mind
> Sing to my worried blood
> To my jet streams

In these very first lines we already find a continuum between the physical condition of the individual narrator and a cosmic perspective. Thus, from the very beginning we encounter a monk who has gone beyond his individual consciousness and dwells in the realm of a greater, global awareness. This is reinforced in the last verses of this strophe, when Merton adds that he swims 'in the world's genius.'

And it is here when, as readers, we may attune to Merton's feelings as he confronts the central question of his entire life: 'Who the hell am I ?' Having reached a stage of spiritual maturity, after years of solitude, prayer, and silence, this monk is still trying to grasp the mystery of his true self, which is not constituted by images, ideas, or symbols but goes beyond them and lives in the pure 'isness' or what the Buddhists call 'suchness.'[47] In short, he longs for the elusive realization of a self who is no-self.

The second stanza persists in Merton's inquiry as to his true nature and origin. Here is a monk who no longer feels isolated from the rest of the world. Life is medically preserved, as it should be, and the world goes on, and yet the quest for identity remains; for now Merton's religious dialectics provide him with a kind of double citizenship, both as a member or a cell of 'this' particular city, Louisville,[48] which keeps him 'functioning,' and as the inhabitant of an eschatological Kingdom and a member of a Mystical Body:

> The world's machinery
> Expands in the walls
> Of the hot musical building

Made in maybe twenty-four
And my lost childhood remains
One of the city's living cells
Thanks to this city
I am still living
But whose life lies here
And whose invented music sings?

In these lines, the poet has a strong intuition that the rhythmic life which breathes within himself is not his own, that he belongs to a much wider scheme for which he is just an instrument, a channel, an expression, even an invention. Again, there is evidence of a double binding or belonging. As part of the world's musical machinery, the poet's life follows its tune, whereas as part of God's self-gift, his life celebrates the song of Creation and has a share in it through his own creativity as conveyed in a life devoted to art and prayer. This is Life so abundant and yet so simple that it can really live in us and through us, as we also freely move in it on condition that it is not interfered with by the noises of the ego. According to Merton, very much influenced by the Benedictine Rule exhorting monks to listen ('obsculta oh, filii,' RB, Pról 1), this life is a subtle music which can be heard everywhere if we only develop our capacity to listen intently, as the Lord would have us do: "Incline your ear, and come unto me: hear, and your soul shall live" (Isaiah 55:3).

The next stanza ties this life in with the figure of Christ: '. . . all my veins run/ With Christ and with the star's plasm.' This is the Christ he discovered in Rome, looking at the frescos in the old run-down chapels beside the Palatine, the One Person he decided to serve as 'My God and my King.'[49] It is also the Christ depicted in the recondite Byzantine chapels of the Italian city: St Cosmas, St Damian, St Mary Major to whom he dedicated such moving poems as 'The Biography' or 'The Communion.'

Here we can still distinguish a dichotomy between an earthly plane, full of suffering and doubt, and a heavenly sphere, which he associates with the reign of Christ. Without neglecting their difference, Merton came to transcend this duality, as inspired by St Augustine, when he realized that God's flame of love pervades the whole created world.

His search for the origin and his longing for home continues throughout the whole poem. In the fourth stanza, the healing presence of masters and saints from different times and traditions is

made manifest. Thus, 'recovery' and 'home' hold the same metaphorical rank in one of these lines to the extent that they are interchangeable. This particular lexical choice is most meaningful as it broadly suggests redemptive policies for our society, lost and wounded. The Buddhist narrative of the world has people become sick because they are blind and thus ignore their true nature. Consequently, the prescription is awakening and seeing. In the Christian story the leading metaphors revolve around the images of loss and belonging, exile and return, separation and union.[50] Be it under the grand Buddhist cosmology or within the Christian metaphorical system of belief, the human task can be said to be a Trinitarian enterprise, one rooted in and aiming towards the Mystery of Love, its Incarnation in the world and our spiritual fulfilment by partaking, as image and likeness, in the very Self of the Living God.

As a committed contemplative, Merton was conversant with both Western and Eastern religious expressions. 'Only the Catholics who are still convinced of the importance of Christian mysticism,' he wrote, 'are also aware that much is to be learned from a study of the techniques and experiences of Oriental religions.'[51] In his dialogue with the Zen master D. T. Suzuki, he discovered that there was a great similarity between the Christian concept of innocence or purity of heart and the Buddhist vacuity or *Sunyata*; between Christian knowledge or moral and metaphysical differentiation and Buddhist ignorance, which obscures the original light of the void. He was also inspired by the Desert Fathers (like St Jerome or St Paul the Hermit) and, like them, regarded true wisdom as union with divine light,

> not considered as an "object" or "thing" but as the "divine poverty" which enriches and transforms us in its own innocence. The recovery of Paradise is the discovery of the "Kingdom of God within us"[...] It is the recovery of man's lost likeness to God, in pure, undivided simplicity.[52]

Merton held the view that man has been clothed over with confusion as with a double cloak. Influenced by the writings of St Bernard, he wrote: 'our only task is to get rid of the "double" garment, the overlying layer of duplicity that is not ourselves.'[53] However, the recovery of our initial simplicity is not so easy as it may seem. It requires a process of complete unlearning, a leaving of everything behind, even our warm and comfortable house, in order to start the journey back to our divine inner self in solitude and silence as beautifully rendered in St

John of the Cross's *Dark Night of the Soul*: 'On a dark night, restless of soul, afire with love, oh blessed fortune!, unnoticed went I forth, my house left now at peace.'[54]

Like him, Merton has abandoned his false refuge and departs in search of the divine abode:

> I have no more sweet home
> I doubt the bed here and the road there

And like Jesus himself, Merton has no place to lay his head. He has become very sceptical and can no longer bear the hectic, oppressive and superficial life of the urban society which he condemned in poems such as 'So, goodbye to cities,' or 'Hymn of not much praise for the city of Miami.' Now, lying on a hospital bed, he tries to rid himself of any false relief or self-deception, and adopts a questioning attitude:

> Here below stars and light
> And the Chicago plane
> Slides up the rainy straits of night
> While in my maze I walk and sweat
> Wandering in the low bone system
> Or searching the impossible ceiling
> For the question and the meaning
> Till the machine rolls in again

The quest for his true identity becomes more and more pressing. Merton feels expelled from paradise, because his beloved is flying on the Chicago plane, and her absence makes him feel lost in a labyrinth. She seemed to be the answer to his search,[55] his resting place, but without her he begins to hunger for 'invented air,' 'community of men,' 'Zen breathing,' 'unmarried fancy,' 'wild gift' and 'compromising answers.'

Meanwhile the prophet-poet keeps depicting the oppression of technical society, the endless want of men, and the logic which runs the world as much as his blood system.

According to Merton, it is precisely the desire, craving, appetite or thirst of our own isolated individual ego, which poses the main obstacle for the discovery of our real, non-illusory nature: 'Ego desire can never culminate in happiness, fulfilment and peace, because it is a fracture which cuts us off from the ground of reality in which truth and peace are found.'[56] Therefore, by our unrest, as creatures, we remain cut off from the loving wisdom in which we should be grounded and live in a condition of brokenness and error. In sharp

contrast to this selfishness and avidity, Merton refers to Christ's behaviour, when he abandoned everything and even gave his life for us:

> Nameless, bloodless and alone
> The Cross comes and Eckhart's scandal
> The Holy Supper and the precise wrong
> And the accurate little spark
> In emptiness in the jet stream
> Only the spark can understand
> All that burns flies upward
> Where the rainy jets have gone
> A sign of needs and possible homes
> And invented back bone
> A dull song of oxygen
> A lost spark in Eckhart's Castle
> World's plasm and world's cell
> I bleed myself awake and well.

The emphasis is now on the need to die in order to live, like Jesus did. The Cross becomes an engaging symbol for the death and resurrection of men in Christ as well as the door to a new life of love 'in the Spirit.' John Howard Griffin pointed out that in the hospital 'Merton plunged into a study of Eckhart.'[57] He was impressed by his sermons and his way of penetrating the core of inner life. Michael Mott also wrote: 'Merton was making notes on Eckhart in his reading notebooks when yet another student nurse came in to announce she had just been appointed to this floor of the hospital.'[58]

Merton was fascinated by Eckhart's concept of *die eigentlichste Armut* or absolute poverty, that is, when a man is empty of 'self and all things,' and he learnt from him that a man should become so poor and dead as not to have even a place for God to act in: 'it is here, in this poverty, that man regains the eternal being that once he was, now is, and evermore shall be.'[59]

Thomas Merton borrowed Eckhart's image of the 'spark of the soul' or *scintilla animae* which the German mystic himself described as 'free of all names, bare of all forms, . . . empty and free,'[60] 'something in the soul so closely akin to God that it is already one with him and need never be united to him.'[61] This mystical spark, this divine likeness in us is the core of our being and is in God even more than it is in us. It is a basic unity within ourselves at the summit of our being where we are, in Eckhart's words, 'one with God.' Merton rephrased it as 'His

Name written in us; as our poverty, as our indigence, as our dependence, as our sonship.'[62]

As Erlinda Paguio has pointed out, when Merton calls himself 'a lost spark in Eckhart's Castle,' he is recalling Meister Eckhart's Sermon 24 which is inspired by Luke 10:38: 'Our Lord Jesus went into a castle and was received by a virgin who was a wife.' The monk's contradictions and suffering at that point in his life might have led him to identify himself with these telling lines.

Finally, at the end of the poem Merton considers the spark or living flame of love as our true identity in God, the everlasting birth of Christ within us:

> Only the spark is now true
> Dancing in the empty room
> All around overhead
> While the frail body of Christ
> Sweats in a technical bed
> I am Christ's lost cell
> His childhood and desert age
> His descent into hell

Merton's spark of the soul is 'dancing in the empty room' because, as he pointed out in his book *New Seeds of Contemplation*, 'the world and time are the dance of the Lord in emptiness.'[63] In these verses, there is an association on the part of the poet between Eckhart's divine spark, the Buddhist experience of emptiness and the Christian search for innocence or selflessness as Paradise. All seems to indicate that in that difficult situation in hospital, Merton had an experience of true void, solitude, poverty, or desert, and he lived the within and the beyond of this nothingness as a source of rich inexhaustible possibilities. He followed Christ's path into death, left everything behind and gave up all, descending into hell only to find himself infused with light and blessed by union with the divinity. By overcoming his alienation from the inmost ground of his identity, he reached a fresh awareness of his true self, as hidden in the ground of Love:

> Love without need and without name
> Bleeds in the empty problem
> And the spark without identity
> Circles the empty ceiling.

According to Sister Thérèse Lentfoehr, an earlier version of this poem had a different ending and read as follows:

> And love without need without name
> Without answer without problem
> Love is the way and love is the home[64]

By the end of his life Merton achieved the wisdom of universal love, grounded in Christ, shining through everything: an 'absolute emptiness' and yet, paradoxically, the womb of 'absolute fullness.' Through his human and divine love for a woman, thus, Merton reached a deeper awareness of the Trinitarian economy of Being which is infinite Giving, Spirit and Life. According to Merton:

> This realization is...not simply the awareness of a loving subject that he has love in himself, but the awareness of the Spirit of love as the source of all that is and of all love.
> Such love is beyond desire, and beyond all restrictions of a desiring and self-centered self . . . Christian charity seeks to realize oneness with the other "in Christ." Buddhist compassion seeks to heal the brokenness of division and illusion and to find wholeness not in an abstract metaphysical "one,"... but...in the void which is Absolute Reality and Absolute Love.[65]

It is in this unlimited Love that Merton sees authentic unity to be possible rather than in an abstract, idealized 'globalization' which is but the mask of a new imperialism and implies the domination of the giants or 'spectres' and the oppression of the weakest. The poet denounced the distortion of looking at the other as enemy and considered it a 'subjective abstraction' based on particular interests. He writes:

> A society that kills real men in order to deliver itself from the phantasm of a paranoid delusion is already possessed by the demon of destructiveness because it has made itself incapable of love. It refuses, *a priori*, to love. It is dedicated not to concrete relations of man with man, but only to abstractions about politics, economics, psychology, and even, sometimes, religion.[66]

However, the unity that Merton advocates is neither abstraction nor mere communication or virtual connection at the level of ideas but a communion of hearts that share the same love for the living truth since, rather than rejoice in the need to conquer or possess, they rejoice in giving.

Throughout his love poems, the monk of Gethsemani teaches us that real communion is incompatible with a sort of economic globalization whose practices plainly reflect man's choice of a false master:

> For what he needs will be given him when he needs it, and in this sense, God will think and act for him. Modern man may have been tempted to look upon this as an evasion. In actual fact it is the

> highest and simplest courage: the courage without which life cannot be faced as it is, and loses its real meaning. This was the central message of the Sermon on the Mount. ...It is fashionable today to point to the evil in the world as though it could be put forward as evidence against this teaching on Providence. But the ironical thing is that the greatest evils in the world today (wars, genocide, slave labor, mass exile, poverty and degradation) are all the direct result of man's rejection of this teaching of Christ... If we have rejected God and chosen Mammon, and if the result is what we were told to expect, then why do we complain?[67]

Only by becoming aware of our 'inmost center,' 'spark' or 'apex,' a 'freedom beyond freedom,'[68] which 'smashes louder than lightning in the great night and was made by God with outlaw fire without rule and reason,'[69] will we be able to recognize God's providence for all and his presence among the poorest. And only then shall we act accordingly.

In his poetry, Merton dreamt of a promised land, or, as Michael Higgins has pointed out, a 'spiritual locus' and 'rootedness.'[70] A place where there can be a coincidence of all in all, a final integration or 'ingathering.' In an atomic age, when western religion and philosophy are in a state of crisis, and human consciousness is threatened by the deepest alienation, he tried to awaken us to a new awareness of our dignity as co-creators with God, entitled to love and name things for the first time. Moreover, he attempted to revive the divine inscription which is already in us since we are born, that spark of the soul which is a source of endless creativity and the most powerful weapon against death. In short, he showed us the path to unbounded Life. *'With the World in my Bloodstream'* is the creation of a man who at the end of his life's journey learnt to be a lover and a giver.

Let us pray that Merton's poetic and prophetic witness help us redeem today's sinful economies, based on fear, hatred and ignorance, and contribute to creating in their place a new global politics of sharing based on a Trinitarian experience of reality: one that acknowledges that we are all loved, that consequently demands that love be made present in our world and one that finally allows the Source of love and the Word of life to speak to our hearts and inspire in us a new language filled with living metaphors[71] of hope and wordings for a world 'charged with the grandeur of God.'

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Notes and References

1. See Ignacio Ramonet, 'Pensamiento único y sistema PPII,' *Un mundo sin rumbo: crisis de fin de siglo*, Madrid, Debate, 1997. The same tenets are also developed in his books *La tiranía de la comunicación*, Madrid, Debate, 1998 and *La golosina visual*, Madrid, Debate, 2000. See also the following excerpt from Susan George's *The Lugano Report: On Preserving Capitalism in the Twenty-first Century*, London and Sterling, Virginia, Pluto Press, 1999, as quoted in *The New Internationalist*, January/February 2000, p. 27: 'If capitalism can be said to possess an ontology, an essence, it is surely that the market, in its full sweep and scope, is harmonious and wise. Like God, it too can create good from apparent evil. From destruction it draws the betterment and the highest possible equilibrium possible.' Susan George is vice-president of Attac (Association for the Taxation of Financial Transactions for the Aid of Citizens <www.attac.org>) and *The Lugano Report* is actually a fictional work which tried to show the horrific consequences of taking the logic of the global economic system to its conclusion.
2. Seamus Heaney, 'Time and again: poetry and the millennium,' an abbreviated version of a Millennium Lecture delivered at the University of Liverpool, 22 March 2000, *The European English Messenger*, Vol. X/2, Autumn 2001, pp. 19-23
3. Merton's actual words were: '. . . it was as if I suddenly saw the secret beauty of their hearts, the depths of their hearts where neither sin nor desire nor self-knowledge can reach, the core of their reality, the person that each one is in God's eyes. If only they could all see themselves as they really *are*. If only we could see each other that way all the time. There would be no more war, no more hatred, no more cruelty, no more greed . . .' (*Conjectures of a Guilty Bystander*, New York, Doubleday, 1966, p. 158
4. See Chalmers MacCormick, 'Huxley's *Ends and Means* Revisited,' *The Merton Seasonal*, 19:3 (1994) pp. 24-27
5. Aldous Huxley, *Ends and Means*, Chatto & Windus, London 1937, p. 8. Volume 13 (200) of *The Merton Annual* includes two clarifying articles on Merton's views on technology: Phillip M. Thompson's 'The Restoration of Balance: Thomas Merton's Technological Critique,' pp. 63-79 and John Wu's 'Technological Perspectives: Thomas Merton and the One-Eyed Giant,' pp. 80-104. *Lugano Report* fictitious authors sum up their eschatological rationale to suppress to billion people by 2020 as follows: 'Our message is not merely that "the ends justify the means," though this may well be so. It is, rather, that Western culture and the liberal

market system must, in the twenty-first century, choose between the ends and The End' (Susan George, *op.cit.* p.28).

6. In his 'Prometheus: A Meditation,' (*Raids on the Unspeakable*, New York, New Directions, 1966, pp.79-88), Merton establishes a distinction between the Prometheus of Hesiod, Cain, and the Prometheus of Aeschylus, Christ on the Cross. The essay seems to us an excellent metaphor of today's neoliberal craving frame of mind. For a historical account of the many versions of the myth up to the 20th century (including Italian, Spanish, English, French pictorial and literary renderings as well as the readings of Voltaire, Goethe, Shelley, Camus, Unamuno, etc.), see Gregorio Luri Medrano, *Biografías de un mito: Prometeos*, Madrid, Trotta, 2001.

7. Aldous Huxley, *op.cit.* p.9

8. *Ibid.* p.250

9. 'To live in the company of the Trinity is our contemplative experience, our life of prayer,' concludes the Cistercian monk from St. Joseph's Abbey, Spencer, Massachusetts, Joseph Chu-Cong, OCSO, (*The Contemplative Experience: Erotic Love and Spiritual Union*, New York, Crossroad, 1999, p.122).

10. Thomas Merton, *Mystics and Zen Masters*, New York, Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1967, p.40

11. Leonardo Boff claims that ethos and pathos should go hand in hand within any agenda seeking to address the three most urgent issues of our times: the problematic social situation, the ecological crisis and massive unemployment. See his *Ética planetaria desde el Gran Sur*, Madrid, Trotta, 2001.

12. '. . . many will come from the east and west to take their places with Abraham and Isaac at the feast in the kingdom of heaven' (Matthew 8:11)

13. These are rephrased excerpts from the Spanish edition of the book by Gisbert Greshake, *El Dios Uno y Trino: Una teología de la Trinidad*, Barcelona, Biblioteca Herder, 2001, p.312.

14. Although English, German, Italian and French versions of Raimon Pannikkar's work are available, this second Spanish version is a revised expanded edition of the former, *La Trinidad: Una experiencia humana primordial*, Madrid, Siruela, 1998, p.92. For a contextualized approach to this Trinitarian perspective see Chapter IV, 'Panikkar: The Systematic Theology of the Future,' in Ewert H. Cousins, *Christ of the 21st Century*, Rockport MA, Element, 1992.

15. Jean Comaroff and John L. Comaroff, 'Millennial Capitalism: First Thoughts on a Second Coming,' in Jean Comaroff and John L. Comaroff (eds), *Millennial Capitalism and the Culture of Neoliberalism*, Durham & London, Duke University Press, 2001, pp.2, 4.

16. Joaquín Estafanía, *¿qué es la globalización? La primera revolución del siglo XXI*, Madrid, Aguilar, 2002, p.28. In the words of Anthony Giddens, 'Globalisation can . . . be defined as the intensification of worldwide social relations which link distant localities in such a way that local happenings are shaped by events occurring many miles away and vice versa' (*The Consequences of Modernity*, Cambridge, Polity Press, 1990, p.63).

17. For a detailed description of these, see Josep F. Mària i Serrano's 'Ah, yes, globalization! A marvellous excuse for many things (R.M. Solow, Nobel Prize for Economy),' *Cuadernos Cristianisme i Justicia*, no.103, December 2000, Barcelona. (available in English at <http://www.fespinal.com>) and 'Las otras caras de la globalización,' *Documento Social: Revista de Estudios Sociales y de Sociología Aplicada*, (ed. Cáritas Española) <http: www. Caritas-esp.org> no. 125, October-December 2001

18. Thomas Merton, 'The Feast of Freedom: Monastic Formation according to Adam of Perseigne,' *The Letters of Adam of Perseigne*, translated by Grace Perigo, Vol. I, Cistercian Fathers Series Number 21, Kalamazoo, Cistercian Publications, 1976, pp.13-14

19. A detailed clarification of the connections between God and the goods, can be found in the following works: Jung Mo Sung, *Desejo, mercado e religiâo*, Petrópolis, RJ, Brazil, Editora Vozes, 1998; José Ma. Mardones, *Capitalismo y religión: la religión política neoconservadora*, Santander, Sal Terrae, 1991; Cristianisme i Justicia, *¿Mundialización o conquista?*, Santander, Sal Terrae, 1999; Bas de Gaay Fortman and Berma Kelin Goldewijk, *God and the Goods. Global Economy in a Civilizational Perspective*, World Council of Churches Publication 1998

20. Aldous Huxley, 'Foreword' (1946), *Brave New World* (1931)

21. Thomas Merton, *Love and Living*, London, Sheldon Press, 1979, pp.25-37

22. Felix Wilfred, 'Las religiones ante la globalización,' in Jon Sobrino & Felix Wilfred (eds), *Concilium: La Globalización y sus Víctimas*, 293, November 2001, p.716

23. See Xavier Melloni, SJ, 'La experiencia de Dios como experiencia de lo Real,' *Vida Nueva*, no. 2315, 2 February 2002, pp.23-29

24. William McNamara, OCD, *The Human Adventure: The Art of Contemplative Living*, Rockport, Element, 1991, p.55

25. Dr. Robert Imperato, *Merton and Walsh on the Person*, Wisconsin, Liturgical Pub., 1987, p.99

26. Federico Mayor Zaragoza, 'Propuestas para cambios inaplazables,' *El País*, Wednesday, 9, January 2002, p.12

27. Václav Havel, 'The Divine Revolution: Lifting the Iron Curtain of the Spirit,' *Civilization*, April/May 1998

28. Aung san Suu Kyi, *The Voice of Hope*, Penguin Books, England 1997, p. 29

29. Although originally written as chapter 16 of *New Seeds of Contemplation*, it is worth reading the context of its publication in *Passion for Peace: The Social Essays of Thomas Merton* (ed. William H. Shannon), New York, Crossroads, 1995, pp.8-19

30. Williams defines 'structures of feeling' as 'affective elements of consciousness and relationships: not feeling against thought, but thought as felt and feeling as thought: practical consciousness of a present kind, in a living and interrelating continuity.' (Raymond Williams, *Marxism and Literature*, Oxford University Press, 1977, p.132)

31. George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, *Metaphors we Live by*, The University of Chicago Press, 1980, p.5

32. George Lakoff, *Metaphor and War: The Metaphor System Used to Justify War in the Gulf*, type-scripted copy of the paper presented on January 30, 1991 on the campus of the University of California at Berkeley. An earlier version had been distributed widely via electronic mail, starting on December 31, 1990.

33. Thomas Merton's essay seems to apply to our own global issues today and, but for a few words which refer to concrete scenarios, his message bears the same urgency as when it was originally written and deserves a very careful reread. 'War and the Crisis of Language,' *Thomas Merton on Peace*, London & Oxford, Mowbray, 1984

34. His prophetic contribution has been wonderfully summed up by Robert Inchausti in *Thomas Merton's American Prophecy*, State University of New York Press 1998, as follows: 'Merton's chief contribution to contemporary thought may just be his overt refusal to employ conventional political categories in his analysis of cultural phenomena in order to raise political issues to a higher level where spiritual themes enter into dialogue with questions of social ethics. His defense of the contemplative life subverts the grand narratives of both the right- and left-wing political theorists - and directly challenges both the conservative unilinear version of history and the Marxist materialist dialectic. In their place, he offers an eschatological view where progress in the realms of charity, compassion, and gratitude matters more than progress in material prosperity because material progress only feeds the insatiable human desire for more; whereas, an increase in charity and compassion curbs our self-centred inclinations and makes possible the beloved community' (p. 75).
35. Arundhati Roy's 'The End of Imagination' (*The Cost of Living*, New York, Modern Library, 1999) was written as a reaction of alarm and protest against nuclear tests conducted in the Thar desert, which transformed first India, and then Pakistan, into nuclear weapon states.
36. Thomas Merton, 'The Inner Experience: Christian Contemplation (III),' *Cistercian Studies*, Vol. XVIII (1983: 2), p.202
37. Thomas Merton, *Mystics and Zen Masters*, *op. cit.*, p.112
38. Kôun Yamada, translations and comments, *Gateless Gate*, Tucson, The University of Arizona Press, 1979, p.215
39. 'A Letter to Pablo Antonio Cuadra Concerning Giants,' in *The Collected Poems of Thomas Merton*, New York, New Directions, 1977, p.380
40. Thomas Merton, *The Asian Journal of Thomas Merton*, New York, New Directions, 1975, p.308
41. In his article 'Theology of Creativity,' Merton tells us that the responsibility of every Christian is to restore all things, including himself, in Christ, so that the whole creation becomes an epiphany and revelation of God's love (*The Literary Essays of Thomas Merton*, New York, New Directions, 1985, pp.369-370).
42. A line from his poem 'Six Night Letters,' included in the collection *Eighteen Poems* (unpublished).
43. Merton describes his feelings on that occasion in his journal of March 23, 1967: 'the rainy evening when M. came to say goodbye before going to Chicago and when I was so terribly lonely, and lay awake half the night, tormented by the gradual realization that we were in love and I did not know how to live without her.' (*Learning to Live: The Journals of Thomas Merton Vol. 6, 1966-1967* (ed. Christine M. Bochen), San Francisco, Harper Collins, 1997, p.208)
44. Jim Forest, *Living with Wisdom: A life of Thomas Merton*, Maryknoll, New York, Orbis Books, 1991, p. 174
45. After the metaphor of James Finley in his fine *resumé* of Merton's message, *Merton's Palace of Nowhere: A Search for God through Awareness of the True Self*, Notre Dame, Indiana, Ave Maria Press, 1978
46. Merton was very fond of melodic images. He even entitled one of the poems in his book *The Strange Islands* 'Elias-Variations on a Theme,' as if it were a musical piece divided into different variations. It should also be remembered that Merton loved listening to music, especially jazz and blues.

47. Thomas Merton, *The Literary Essays of Thomas Merton*, *op. cit.* p.364
48. Merton did not completely overcome his rejection of big artificial and inhuman cities, which are portrayed in poems like 'So, goodbye to cities' or 'Hymn of not much Praise for the city of Miami' (*The Collected Poems of Thomas Merton*, New York, New Directions, 1975, pp.19-20).
49. Thomas Merton, *The Seven Storey Mountain*, New York, Harcourt Brace & Company, 1976, p.109
50. However, a careful reading of the two narratives and a meeting of Jesus and Buddha, love and wisdom, is being proposed by representatives of both religions as necessary to heal our common world. Suffice it to mention here two seminal books out of a growing body of literature along the same lines: Thich Nhat Hanh, *Going Home: Jesus and Buddha as Brothers*, New York, Riverhead Books, 1999 and Aloysius Pieris, SJ, *Love Meets Wisdom: A Christian Experience of Buddhism*, Maryknoll, New York, Orbis Books, 1988
51. Thomas Merton, *Zen and the Birds of Appetite*. New York, New Directions, 1968, p.21
52. *Ibid.* p.102
53. *Thomas Merton on St. Bernard*, Michigan, Cistercian Publications 1970, p.119
54. San Juan de la Cruz, *Obra Completa (I)*, ed. de Luce López-Baralt y Eulogio Pacho, Madrid, Alianza, 1994, p.66
55. Just after meeting Margie for the first time, he remembers some lines of his favourite poet, Rilke: '. . . Were you not always/distracted by expectation, as though all this/ were announcing someone to love? . . .' (Quoted by Michael Mott, *The Seven Mountains of Thomas Merton*. Boston, MA, Houghton Mifflin Company, 1984, p.435).
56. Thomas Merton, *Zen and the Birds of Appetite*, *op. cit.* pp.85-86
57. John Howard Griffin, *Follow the Ecstasy*. Fort Worth, JHG Editions, 1983, p.79
58. Michael Mott, *The Seven Mountains of Thomas Merton*, *op. cit.* p.435
59. Quoted by Merton from Blakney's translation of Meister Eckhart in *Zen and the Birds of Appetite*, *op. cit.* p.10
60. Quoted by Erlinda Paguio in 'Blazing in the spark of God: Thomas Merton's References to Meister Eckhart', *The Merton Annual*, Vol.5, 1992, p.256
61. Thomas Merton, *Zen and the Birds of Appetite*, *op. cit.* p.11
62. Thomas Merton, *Conjectures of a Guilty Bystander*, New York, Doubleday Image Paperback, 1968, pp.140-142
63. Thomas Merton, *New Seeds of Contemplation*, New York, New Directions, 1972, p.297
64. Quoted by Sister Thérèse Lentfoehr, *Words and Silence: On the Poetry of Thomas Merton*, p. 69.
65. Thomas Merton, *Zen and the Birds of Appetite*, *op. cit.* p.86
66. Thomas Merton, 'A Letter to Pablo Antonio Cuadra Concerning Giants,' *The Collected Poems of Thomas Merton*, *op. cit.* p.375
67. Thomas Merton, 'The Inner Experience: Prospects and Conclusions (VIII),' *Cistercian Studies*, Vol. XIX (1984:3), pp.344-345
68. Thomas Merton, *Love and Living*, New York, Farrar, Straus Giroux, 1979, pp.8-9
69. Thomas Merton, *Working Notebook #21*, April-June 1966, Thomas Merton Studies Center, Bellarmine University, Louisville, KY

70. Michael Higgins, 'Merton and the Real Poets: Paradise Rebugged,' *The Merton Annual: Studies in Religion, Culture, Literature, and Social Concerns*, Vol. 3, New York, AMS Press, 1990, p. 175

71. 'La metáfora es el proceso retórico por el que el discurso libera el poder que tienen ciertas ficciones de redescribir la realidad.' (Paul Ricoeur, *La MetáforaViva*, Madrid, Ed. Europa, 1985, p. 15). See the work of the philosopher synthesized by Jesús Díaz Soriano, *Revelación y lenguaje: Una lectura hermenéutica de la palabra de Dios a través de la filosofía de Paul Ricoeur*, Doctoral thesis presented at the Faculty of Theology at the University of Fribourg, Switzerland. Salamanca, San Esteban, 2001