

## Some Reflections on Islamic Poems by Thomas Merton

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Who could have imagined in February 2001, when Angus Stuart did me the honor of asking me to give this address, that our universal embrace of Islam would need to be so particularly tender. I come from a country which is currently demonizing Islam and which seems to be trying to drag yours along in this wickedness. How particularly important it is, therefore, that we understand something of the beauty of Islam and those who embrace it. Therefore, let us begin our session with a moment of silent prayer for those who know God by the beautiful name of Allah.

**I**N WHAT FOLLOWS I will give a brief chronological (by publication date) listing of Merton's seven explicitly Islamic poems and say a word about each. This will introduce us to the breadth of Merton's interest in Islam in line with the theme of our conference, Thomas Merton's Universal Embrace. First, though, a general word about Merton's interest in Islam and a few suggestions of sources for further study.

### Introduction

It seems to me that mutual comprehension between Christians and Moslems is something of very vital importance today, and unfortunately it is rare and uncertain, or else subjected to the vagaries of politics.<sup>1</sup>

This might be a remark by an academic summoned by this morning's television news program for an interview. But in fact it is a comment of Thomas Merton in a letter on December 26, 1962 to the Pakistani Muslim, Abdul Aziz, with whom he had a long and fruitful correspondence. Thomas Merton's profound study and understanding of Buddhism, particularly its Mahayana 'incarnations,' Zen and Tibetan, is well known. But he was equally interested in and conversant with Islam, particularly its mystical manifestation, Sufism. And until very recently this went largely unremarked among Merton scholars.

Of course Merton was not the first Roman Catholic, or even the first Cistercian, to be seriously interested in the Islamic tradition. Charles de Foucauld (d.1916), who became a Cistercian and then left the order to live among the poor in Algeria (where he was subsequently martyred), was, in fact, converted to authentic Christianity when he encountered the deep piety of Islam during his military service in North Africa. Merton knew and venerated Foucauld (as, indeed, I do). Another Frenchman, Louis Massignon (d.1962), deeply influenced by Foucauld, was, himself, the pre-eminent Catholic Islamic scholar of his day, producing a classic study of the technical vocabulary of mysticism in Islam as well as introducing the martyr mystic Ibn Mansur al-Hallaj (d.922) to the West. It is from al-Hallaj via Massignon that Merton gleaned the phrase *le point vierge* which figures so prominently in the 'Fourth and Walnut' revelation.<sup>2</sup>

In view of these Franco-Islamic connections (which would make an interesting study for someone whose French is better than mine), it is even odder that, until the perfectly splendid volume *Merton and Sufism: The Untold Story* edited by Bob Baker and Gray Henry<sup>3</sup> in 1999, there was no book-length study of Merton and Islam. (And in so far as this is a collection of articles, we are still without one.) One had to dig in the bibliographies provided by *The Merton Seasonal* to find studies on Merton and Islam. Before the turn of the century, to my knowledge there were only six scholars who had written or spoken seriously about the subject: Sr. Madeline Abdelnour and Burton Thurston (both now, alas, deceased), Terry Graham, Sidney Griffith, Erlinda Paguio and me. The volume *Merton and Sufism* collects work by Griffith, Paguio, and the Thurstons and adds essays by its editors. Additionally, it anthologizes excerpts from Merton's lectures on Sufism, prints all his Sufi poems and his reviews of books on Islam for various Cistercian publications.

In addition to the material in the Baker-Henry volume, primary source material for a study of Merton and Islam is found in his journals, especially *Conjectures of a Guilty Bystander* (CGB)<sup>4</sup> and in the journals of the 1960s. In *Learning to Love* (LL)<sup>5</sup> it is clear that the October, 1966 visit of Sidi Abdesalam, an Algerian Sufi, was of great, personal importance to Merton. Merton called it a 'momentous visit' (LL, p.152) perhaps because the Sufi told him that he was 'very close to mystical union and the slightest thing now can so to speak push me over the edge' (LL, p.153). A secondary account of the visit is to be found in

the article in Merton and Sufism by Nicole Abadie, who was present for the encounter.<sup>6</sup>

Shannon's collection of letters, *The Hidden Ground of Love* (HGL), includes letters to Reza Arasteh (an Iranian psychologist), Abdul Aziz (a Pakistani Sufi to whom Merton opened the secret doors of his prayer life) and Martin Lings (an English Orientalist). In my view the Aziz letters are particularly important for students of Merton. The American, Herbert Mason, with whom Merton corresponded, introduced him to Louis Massignon. The Massignon-Merton letters are found in Shannon's collection, *Witness to Freedom* (WF).<sup>7</sup>

Perhaps the most interesting and frustrating body of primary material are the tapes of the Sufi talks Merton gave to the novices at Gethsemani from 1966-68. Much of this material is available commercially from Credence Cassettes,<sup>8</sup> but don't expect cogent, outlineable academic lectures. Merton's style is breezy and meandering. Frankly, it drives me crazy. Students will find it more helpful to consult Merton's reading notebooks, especially number 18, which are available at the Thomas Merton Studies Center at Bellarmine University in Louisville, Kentucky.

Merton, himself, summarized his work on Islam in a letter of October 31, 1967 to the Egyptian, Aly Abdel Ghani.

I am very familiar with the traditions of Sufism, and have of course read much of the Holy Qur'an. I have read Avicenna, or some of his writing, and very much like others such as Ibn-Arabi, Ibn-Abbad (of Morocco), the Persian Rumi, etc. I wish I knew Arabic, as I could read more in the original. (WF, p.335)

Reviewing Merton's studies in Islam what strikes one is, first, that his reading is primarily in the Sufi traditions, and, second, that the list of authors he read is a sort of 'who's who' of Islamic scholars of the mid-20th century: A. Reza Arasteh, Arthur Arberry (translator of the Qur'an), Titus Burckhardt, Henry Corbin, Martin Lings, Louis Massignon, Seyyed Hossein Nasr, Paul Nwiya, Cyprien Rice, Frithjof Schuon; the list goes on.

That Merton was deeply interested in and influenced by Islam is evident. Let us consider briefly why he might have been attracted by Islam, and, in particular, Sufism. Merton's studies focused on central Islamic concepts like the unity of God (TAWHID) and the revelation of God's word (TANZIL). But his real fascination was with its spiritual realities, the way in which Islam set people 'free to travel in a realm of

white-hot faith as bare and grand as the desert itself, faith in the One, God, the compassionate and the merciful. What are compassion and mercy but the gifts of freedom to freedom?' (CGB, p.90) Merton deeply appreciated the Sufi analysis of the human condition and of progress in the spiritual life.<sup>9</sup> He was much taken by the TARIQ (the Sufi path), the JIHAD AL-AKHBAR (the greater Jihad, or struggle with/against the self), the concept of FANA (annihilation, extinction or passing away of the self/ego), and the prayer practice of DHIKR<sup>10</sup> (remembrance, recollection, recitation of the Holy, Beautiful Names of God). As did study of Zen Buddhism, Merton's study of Sufism gave him another set of concepts, another language if you will, in which to speak of Christian spiritual experiences, of the deepest life of prayer.

Merton once quipped to his novices that 'One Sufi did everything to be as shocking to the Ulema as possible. They have a tendency to break all of the laws from A to Z down as a way of hiding their inner life. That is what I have been doing the last 25 years to hide my Sufi experience.'<sup>11</sup> The tone of Merton's voice indicates his approval of what he called this Sufi 'beatnik style.' But the stylistic affinity was not only personal, but literary. The way the Sufis spoke and taught about religious experience appealed to Merton.

In commenting on Ibn al'Arabi and Al'Hujwiri in *Conjectures of a Guilty Bystander* Merton speaks of the 'nonlogical logic of mysticism and of direct experience, expressed in statements which do not agree and which nevertheless finally explode into a meaning that can be seized if one has some experience of what is being said' (CGB, p.210). Merton found non-logical, metaphorical expression of the truths of religious experience attractive. One hears this 'stylistic affinity' in a remark he made in another of the talks to the novices. Sufis, he notes, 'don't have formulas or public answers . . . [t]hey have stories and sayings and hints and proverbs and things like that and you make out the best you can.' In *Conjectures of a Guilty Bystander* Merton said 'Sufism is essence without form' (CGB, p.211). (Parenthetically, I think this was part of Merton's attraction to Zen, as well. Zen seeks direct, essential religious experience without the encumbrance of doctrinal formulation.) As a writer, Merton was more poet than systematic theologian (much to the delight of some of us and the devilment of others!) Sufis use of story and poem to express religious truth was natural for him—and

brings us naturally to a consideration of his Islamic poems which are often reworkings of extant Sufi or Islamic narratives.

### Thomas Merton's Islamic Poems

While there are a number of poems which evince Merton's profound understanding of Islam, there are seven explicitly Islamic poems in *The Collected Poems* (CP).<sup>12</sup> Three of these are longer, multi-section compositions. Let me comment very briefly and roughly in chronological order on each.

On a visit to the Cincinnati Museum of Art on October 27, 1960 Merton saw the 'beautifully designed cloth that was once spread over the tomb of a holy man, Imam Riza' (to Abdul Aziz in HGL, p.45). Merton remarked to both Louis Massignon (Oct. 29, 1960, WF, pp.279-80) and Abdul Aziz (Nov. 17, 1960 in HGL, p.45) on the impact of this experience. ('This encounter had a deep effect on me. . .' WF, p.280) He felt that by means of it he had 'come into contact with a great spirit.' (HGL, p.45) Merton noted to Massignon, 'It had on it a wonderful Sufi poem, translated for those who were interested.' (WF, p.280) The poem 'Tomb Cover of Imam Riza' is his version of the poem embroidered on the cloth. As Erlinda Paguio notes, Merton's poem 'is derived from the English translation made by the Islamic scholar, Arthur J. Arberry, and from the subsequent reformulation made by the art expert, Phyllis Ackerman.'<sup>13</sup> The poem emphasizes the importance of the Imam in Shiia Islam. Shiites believe that the Imam to be descended from The Prophet (via Ali) and not only the spiritual leader of the community but also the proper interpreter of Islamic tradition. Imam Riza was a Persian, and his tomb became a place of pilgrimage. The poem calls it 'the threshold of holiness in the dust of the road/where mighty kings have laid their heads and crowns' (CP, p.985).

The last collection of lyrics which Merton, himself, prepared for publication was *Emblems of a Season of Fury*, published in 1963. It contains two Islamic poems, 'The Moslems' Angel of Death' and 'Song for the Death of Averroes.' In a passing note in his journal on January 8, 1961 Merton says, 'Reading . . . Schuon on Moslem angels.'<sup>14</sup> On January 14, 1961 he writes to Herbert Mason about the poem 'The Moslems' Angel of Death' (WF, p.269) which he subsequently sent both to Louis Massignon and Ernesto Cardenal. Islam has a lively sense of the spiritual world and especially of angels and jinn. The Angel of Death is 'Izra'il,

one of four archangels, whose description sounds to me a bit like something from the Biblical books of Ezekiel or Daniel. In addition to four faces (one for each compass point), 'Izra'il has 4,000 wings and his body consists of all eyes and tongues. Perhaps for this reason Merton's poem compares him to a 'jeweled peacock' that 'stirs all over/With fireflies' (CP, p.307). The peacock's long tail feathers are, of course, tipped with 'eyes.' In Islamic mythology 'Izra'il was able to snatch from earth a handful of its main constituents so that God could make human beings from them. God then made him the angel of death, so he figures in humankind's beginning and ending. The light imagery in Merton's poem no doubt comes from Merton's knowledge that in 'Izra'il's roll of human beings, the names of the blessed are surrounded by a bright circle.<sup>15</sup> The poems says 'He takes his pleasure in/Lights.' 'He turns the city lights in his fingers like money' (CP, p.307). 'He is a miser. His fingers find the money./He puts the golden lights in his pocket' (CP, p.308). The subtitle of the poem, 'Algeria 1961,' is perplexing. Is it a reference to the many lives being taken by 'Izra'il in the Algerian civil war? And, if so, are the final two lines of the poem ('Azrael! Azrael!/See the end of trouble!' CP, p.308) a note of consolation or bitterly ironic? The dominant metaphor of the poem is the figure of 'Izra'il counting out human lives like a miser counts out his money. I find it none too cheerful.

'Song for the Death of Averroes' is a collection of three poems 'after the Spanish version of Asin Palacios' (CP, p.325). Miguel Asin Palacios (1871-1944) was a Spanish scholar of Islam who translated Arabic works into Spanish and in 1933 wrote a long article on Ibn 'Abbad (whom we shall meet shortly), 'Un Precursor Hispano-Musulman de San Juan de la Cruz.'<sup>16</sup> Written in the first person singular, these poems describe Ibn Al Arabi's interactions with Averroes. Both were 'Moors,' Spanish Muslims. Averroes (Ibn Rushid, d. 1198) was a great philosopher, a commentator on Aristotle and a rationalist who sought to reconcile religion and philosophy. Ibn Arabi (d. 1240) was a Sufi, a mystic and, interestingly, the disciple of two women Sufi Masters. He wrote a complete system of mystic knowledge which has been extensively studied by later Muslim theologians. We know from his letter to Abdul Aziz on September 24, 1961 that Merton was reading Henry Corbin's book on Ibn Arabi (HGL, p.50) to whom he refers at least twice in *Conjectures of a Guilty Bystander*.

The tension in the poems in ‘Song for the Death of Averroes’ is that between two ways of knowing, the rational way of Averroes and the mystical way of Ibn Arabi. Epistemology is a frequent subject in Islamic theology and philosophy. The great Persian Sufi teacher of the 13th century, Jelaluddin Rumi, wrote a poem, ‘Two Kinds of Intelligence,’ selections of which bear repeating here:

There are two kinds of intelligence: One acquired,  
as a child in school memorizes facts and concepts  
from books and from what the teacher says,  
collecting information from the traditional sciences  
as well as from the new sciences. . . .

There is another kind of tablet, one  
already completed and preserved inside you.  
A spring overflowing its springbox. A freshness  
in the center of the chest. This other intelligence  
does not turn yellow or stagnate. It's fluid  
and it doesn't move from outside to inside  
through the conduits of plumbing-learning.

This second knowing is a fountainhead  
from within you, moving out.<sup>17</sup>

In Merton's poem, these two ways of knowing are personified in Averroes and Ibn Arabi. Arabi, the speaker of the poem, believes he understands the way of Averroes ('he saw that I had understood him right away' CP, p.325), but Averroes cannot understand Arabi's way ('For though I had understood him, he had not understood me' CP, p.326). Averroes is described as 'an eminent philosopher, dedicated entirely/to a life of thought, study and rational investigation' (CP, p.327); Ibn Arabi is 'one of those endowed with mystical/gifts, one able to unlock His door' (CP, p.327). In *Conjectures of a Guilty Bystander* Merton remarks on the 'the story of Averroes' contact with and interest in the young Sufi mystic, Ibn al'Arabi, and his *angustia* at not being able to grasp what Arabi had seen clearly through a divine gift. It is a poignant story and I made a poem of it' (CGB, p.208). A very fine poem in my view.

‘Readings from Ibn Abbad’ occurs in the volume, *Raids on the Unspeakable* (RU) which is a collection of prose pieces and calligraphy prepared for publication in 1964-65. In one way or another the pieces in the book deal with the arts and religious experience. Merton opens the set of ten ‘readings’ from Ibn ’Abbad with a prose introduction. He was very familiar with ’Abbad and had reviewed the classic by Paul Nwyia, *Ibn ’Abbad de Ronda* (Beruit, 1961) for *Collectanea Cisterciensia*. Nwyia

believed ’Abbad to be the most important mystical writer of the 14th century.<sup>18</sup> Born in Ronda in 1333, he emigrated to Morocco where Sufi life flourished. Inclined to solitude and meditation, he devoted himself to asceticism and mysticism and wrote letters of spiritual direction and a manual of devotion. (By the way, the letters are now readily available in English in the Paulist Press series ‘Classics of Western Spirituality’ in the volume *Ibn ’Abbad of Ronda, Letters on the Sufi Path* translated and introduced by John Renard.<sup>19</sup>) Writing in *The Sufi Orders in Islam*, Spencer Trimingham remarked that the mystic ’Abbad ‘stands out simply because of the spiritual aridity of the age.’<sup>20</sup> Be that as it may, it is not hard to understand Merton’s attraction for the Shadhili Sufi, especially in view of his apparent influence on John of the Cross (about whom Merton also wrote). Merton had mentioned the Ibn ’Abbad-John of the Cross connection with Reza Arasteh in a letter of December 18, 1965 (HGL, p.41). Writing to Abdul Aziz on November 7, 1965 Merton says

I am sure that...I spoke of Ibn Abbad, by whom I was very much impressed, and later I even did some adapted versions of his thought, in semi-poetic fashion, based of course on the French version. These will be published next year in a book... (HGL, p.61).

There are ten ‘adaptations’ in Raids, a description of the Sufi by a friend, a description of his burial place (which became a pilgrimage destination), a ‘prayer and sermon,’ and seven of his teachings, two framed as letters, and three ‘to a novice.’ Not surprisingly, the biographical matter, though poetically presented, is accurate. I am quite struck when I read this material by how the paradoxical presentations of ’Abbad’s teaching sound like Zen material. Three short sections of the poem give a sense of what I mean (RU, pp.146-147,149):

4: Desolation [recall John of the Cross’ Dark Night of the Soul]

For the servant of God  
Consolation is the place of danger  
Where he may be deluded  
(Accepting only what he sees,  
experiences or knows)  
But desolation is his home:  
For in desolation he is seized by God  
And entirely taken over into God.  
In darkness, in emptiness,

In loss, in death of self.  
Then the self is only ashes. Not even ashes!

5: To Belong to Allah

To belong to Allah  
Is to see in your own existence  
And in all that pertains to it  
Something that is neither yours  
Nor from yourself,  
Something you have on loan;  
To see your being in His Being,  
Your substance in His Substance,  
Your strength in His Strength:  
Thus you will recognize in yourself  
His title to possession of you  
As Lord,  
And your own title as servant:  
Which is Nothingness.

8: To a Novice [remember Merton was Master of Scholastics]

Be a son of this instant:  
It is a messenger of Allah  
And the best of messengers  
Is one who announces your indigence,  
Your nothingness.  
Be a son of this instant,  
Thanking Allah  
For a mouthful of ashes.

(This last poem sets up echoes in my mind of the poem 'A Messenger from the Horizon' in *Emblems of a Season of Fury*). In his introductory notes Merton says the purpose of the pieces 'is to share something of an encounter with a rich and fervent religious personality of Islam, in whom the zeal of the Sufis is revealed. . .'<sup>21</sup> In this he certainly succeeds.

At the time of his departure for Asia in 1968 Merton was preparing two volumes of verse for publication, the long and difficult poem *The Geography of Lograire* and a collection of lyrics entitled *Sensation Time at the Home*. *Lograire* is divided into four sections, one for each point of the compass. The section 'East' begins with a six part poem entitled 'East

with Ibn Battuta' (CP, pp.537-544). In the notes he prepared to go with the manuscript, Merton records that Ibn Battuta (1304-1369) was a Muslim from Morocco who wrote an account of his travels between 1325 and 1354. Merton's poems are entitled 'Cairo,' 'Syria,' 'The Nusayris' (a heretical sect of Islam), 'Mecca,' 'Isfahan,' 'Delhi,' and 'Calicut,' obviously tracing Ibn Battuta's journeys eastward. They record a wonderful and charming travelogue in the voice of a fourteenth century Muslim. As was 'Song for the Death of Averroes' and 'Readings from Ibn Abbad,' the poems are re-workings of translations of the Arabic originals.

*Sensation Time at the Home* 'and other new poems' form Appendix I of Merton's Collected Poems. The origin of the poem 'Lubnan' was also Merton's reading of Ibn Arabi in which he apparently encountered Idris, whom we know in Biblical tradition as Enoch. 'Lubnan' is Lebanon, the location of Baalbeck to which Idris comes down. Idris is mentioned twice in the Holy Qur'an. In Surah 19.56-57 he is called 'a saint, a Prophet; And we raised him to high station.' In Surah 21:85 he is called 'steadfast,'<sup>22</sup> one of the 'patient ones.' Like the Biblical Enoch (with whom some Islamic scholars connect him), Idris is a pious man who lives a long life and is taken by God to himself. In Islamic lore he is the first to use pens, to sew and wear clothing and so was a patron saint of tailors.<sup>23</sup>

As Erlinda Paguio points out in her excellent commentary on the poem, in Ibn 'Arabi's work, *Bezels of Wisdom*, Idris and Ilyas (Elias) are two names assigned to the same person. Idris had a vision in which he saw Lubnan (Mt Lebanon) splitting open and disgorging a fiery horse. Ilyas mounted it (rather like The Prophet, himself, mounted a heavenly steed for his visit to the divine realms) and became pure intellect.<sup>24</sup> Merton's poem describes this vision and the ride on 'a horse harnessed in flame/A car of fire' (CP, p.614). It reminds the reader that

Far away the red saint rides the shouting fire of that horse  
Idris—Ilyas one interpreter  
May be back tomorrow morning  
When the vision  
Will be total. (CP, p.614)

In view of the fact that the imagery of the poem is apocalyptic, and that it was written in a time when Merton was much taken up with the

threat of nuclear war, I am not sure whether it represents promise or threat.

The poem 'The Night of Destiny' from the same collection also describes visionary experience. The 'Night of Destiny' is the 27th day of Ramadan when, Muslims believe, The Prophet received his first revelation. The very early Meccan Surah of the Qur'an, Surah 96 known as 'The Clot,' refers to this night when the first verses of the Qur'an were revealed in Muhammad's vision on Mt Hira. The passage begins as follows:

In the name of Allah, the Beneficent, the Merciful.  
 Read: In the name of thy Lord who created.  
 Created man from a clot.  
 Read: And thy Lord is the Most Bounteous,  
 Who taught by the pen,  
 Taught man that which he knew not.  
 Nay, but verily man is rebellious.  
 That he thinketh himself independent!  
 Lo! unto thy Lord is the return. (Surah 96:1-8)

Merton provides a gloss on the poem 'The Night of Destiny' explaining, not quite accurately, that it 'celebrates the end of the Moslem fast, Ramadan, and commemorates the giving of the Koran to Mohammed. Hence it has something of the Spirit of Christmas, a feast when the heavens open and the "Word" is heard on earth' (CP, p.634).

Merton's poem is about this coming of the 'Word.' It begins with the T.S. Eliotesque line, 'In my ending is my meaning' (CP, p.634). In the poem the speaker seems to be reading at night by a lamp, a 'Weak friend/In the knowing night.' But he is, in fact, illuminated by the 'tongue of flame/Under the heart.' The poem asks, very beautifully, Who illuminates: 'Who holds the homeless light secure/In the deep heart's room?' The enigmatic, but very precise answer is 'Midnight!/Kissed with flame!' Life, interior life, may be dark ('love is black'), but there are moments, however fleeting, of illumination, of being kissed by Love (a very Sufi notion and turn of phrase). In fact, all of the images of darkness in the poem are positive: Night is 'knowing;' love is 'black' and 'darkness,' but it is love; in the night the lamp provides 'the small circle of seeing;' midnight is 'kissed with flame;' and in the night all the lost are found. The speaker of the poem exclaims 'My love is darkness!' (CP, p.635) and the poem closes

Only in the void  
 Are all ways one:

Only in the night  
 Are all the lost  
 Found.

In my ending is my meaning.  
 This, I think, is a good line with which to end this catalogue of Merton's Islamic poems.

### Conclusion

In *Conjectures of a Guilty Bystander* Merton noted

I am more and more convinced that my job is to clarify something of the tradition that lives in me, and in which I live: the tradition of wisdom and spirit that is found not only in Western Christendom but in Orthodoxy, and...in Asia and in Islam (CGB, p.194).

In these seven Islamic poems Merton is working at this 'job.' His interest in Islam, like his interest in Buddhism, tended to be focused on its mystical traditions and on its ways of articulating mystical or visionary experience. This is self-evident in the poems. But the world and culture of Islam was also very much in Merton's bloodstream. The transfusion came by means of his European roots, his 'French connection,' if you will, and his knowledge of Romance languages. But the result was very much Islamic and not European, which is to say Merton embraced Islam, not some European Orientalist's version of it.

The reason for this embrace, it seems to me, was profoundly Christian. Writing to Abdul Aziz on June 2, 1963 Merton said,

We must strive more and more to be universal in our interests and in our zeal for the glory of the one God, and may His Name be magnified forever in us. (HGL, p.55)

The Christian's 'universal embrace' reflects the nature of the God of Christians who, as Jesus taught us, stands in the road waiting to embrace the ones who come.

While it would be very nice to end these remarks on Merton's Islamic poetry on this attractive, and I believe accurate, note, our present troubled times suggest, to me at any rate, that Merton's remarks to Abdul Aziz on November 7, 1965 are a more appropriate and timely conclusion:

Well, my friend, we live in troubled and sad times, and we must pray the infinite and merciful Lord to bear patiently with the sins of this world, which are very great. We must humble our hearts in

silence and poverty of spirit and listen to His commands which come from the depths of His love, and work that men's hearts may be converted to the ways of love and justice, not of blood, murder, lust and greed. I am afraid that the big powerful countries are a very bad example to the rest of the world in this respect. (HGL, pp.61-62)

#### Notes and References

1. Thomas Merton, *The Hidden Ground of Love*, Letters (ed. William H. Shannon). New York, Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 1985, p.53 (HGL)
2. For more on the Merton-Massignon connection see the article by Sidney H. Griffith, 'Merton, Massignon, and the Challenge of Islam,' in the Baker-Henry volume listed below.
3. Bob Baker and Gray Henry (eds.), *Merton and Sufism, the Untold Story: A Complete Compendium*. Louisville, Ky, Fons Vitae, 1999
4. Thomas Merton, *Conjectures of a Guilty Bystander*. New York, Doubleday/Image, 1968. See pp. 90, 147, 151, 181, 194, 205, 208. (CGB)
5. Thomas Merton, *Learning to Love: The Journals of Thomas Merton Vol. 6* (ed. Christine M. Bochen). San Francisco, HarperSanFrancisco, 1997 (LL)
6. Baker and Henry (eds.), op.cit. pp.183-192
7. Thomas Merton, *Witness to Freedom* (ed. William Shannon). New York, Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 1994 (WF)
8. Credence Cassettes, P.O. Box 22582, Kansas City, MO 64141, U.S.A.
9. For an exposition of this see Burton Thurston, 'Merton's Reflections on Sufism' in Baker and Henry (eds.), op.cit. pp.33-39.
10. For more on this see my article 'Thomas Merton and Islam: The Example of Dhikr,' *American Benedictine Review* 45/2 (1994) which is reprinted in the Baker-Henry volume.
11. My source for the Sufi lectures is a transcription by Burton B. Thurston of some copies of the tapes.
12. Thomas Merton, *The Collected Poems of Thomas Merton*. New York, New Directions, 1977 (CP)
13. Erlinda Paguio, 'Islamic Themes in Merton's Poetry' in Baker and Henry (eds.), op.cit. p.90.
14. Thomas Merton, *Turning Toward the World: The Journals of Thomas Merton Vol. 4* (ed. Victor Kramer). San Francisco, HarperSanFrancisco, 1997, p.86 (TTW)
15. For a brief description of 'Izra'il see the entry of that title in H.A.R. Gibbs and J.H.H. Kramer, *Shorter Encyclopedia of Islam*. Leiden, E.J. Brill, 1953 p.190
16. M. Asin Palacios, 'Un Precursor hispano-musulman de San Juan de la Cruz,' *al-Andalus*, i (1933) pp.7-79
17. Rumi Jeleluddin, Jalalu'l-Din Rumi, John Moyne (Translator), Maulana Jalal al Din Rumi, *This Longing: Poetry, Teaching, Stories and Letters of Rumi*. Putney, Vt, Threshold Books, 1988, p.36
18. Paul Nwyia, 'Ibn 'Abbad,' *The Encyclopedia of Islam*, B. Lewis, et al. (eds). Leiden, E.J. Brill, 1971, III p.670

19. John Renard, Ibn 'Abbad of Ronda, *Letters on the Sufi Path*. New York, Paulist Press, 1986
20. Spencer Trimingham, *The Sufi Orders in Islam*. Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1971, p.84
21. Thomas Merton, *Raids on the Unspeakable*. New York, New Directions, 1966, p.141
22. This and subsequent Qur'anic citations are from Muhammad M. Pickthall, *The Glorious Qur'an: Text and Explanatory Translation*. Mecca, Muslim World League, 1977
23. Gibbs and Krammer, op.cit., pp.158-159
24. Paguio, op.cit. p.95