

Thomas Merton's Contribution to 20th Century Spirituality: An Appraisal

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THOMAS MERTON HAS been described as arguably the greatest Catholic spiritual writer of the 20th century. He merited this description partly because he did not touch the hearts only of Roman Catholics but embraced a more open vision of catholicity beyond the limits of a single institution (1). In the sense defined by the contemporary American Roman Catholic theologian David Tracy, Thomas Merton can be described as a 'spiritual classic'. We usually think of classics in terms of a written text. While all theological or spiritual texts are culturally and historically conditioned, some of them have the capacity to cross the boundaries of time or place and retain, or even increase, their popularity and importance in contexts very different from their origins. These are what we call 'classics'. 'Classics' disclose something that remains compelling, continue to challenge us and bring us into transforming contact with what is enduring and vital in the Christian tradition. In general, the strength of classics is that they do not merely offer us information but are capable of persuading and moving us to a response (2).

How can Merton be a classic? Well, for Tracy, the category of a classic is not limited to written texts but is extended to include certain key people who achieve across time some kind of paradigmatic status in reference to the

Christian tradition. Thus, Thomas Merton may be thought to be as much of a 'classic text' as the *Showings* of Julian of Norwich.

Why do I consider Merton to be a 20th century classic? Precisely because there are so many Thomas Mertons. During and after his lifetime people have been able to identify with a range of different aspects of his personality, his insights and his vision.

For me, as for the great monastic scholar Dom Jean Leclercq, Merton's importance and continued popularity is linked to the fact that he both symbolized *and* addressed a time of critical transition in the West – religious, cultural and political – that began with World War II. So, in Merton several worlds meet: a Western Church in process of renewal (reaching a particular peak in the Second Vatican Council), the rediscovery by the West of Eastern Christianity, the discovery by Christianity of other world religions – particularly Buddhism, plus a range of political and social movements of change and critique (3).

This is not to say that Merton's continued impact has nothing to do with the quality of the man himself or of his spiritual wisdom. However, at least equally, it tells us a great deal about the spiritual climate in the English-speaking world in the last half of the 20th century

and today. Jean Leclercq focused on Merton's iconic role in a time of cultural and religious transition. In a real sense, Merton is a paradigm of the late 20th century spiritual quest. In particular, he stands for the movement outwards from a spirituality of excessive interiority – ecclesiocentric and world-rejecting – to embrace the outer quotidian world and to encounter 'otherness' in all its forms. There is a clear development from the traditional pre-Vatican II spirituality of *The Seven Storey Mountain* (1948) to the sympathetic and committed observations on the public world in *Conjectures of a Guilty Bystander* (1966).

As in the title of Tony Padovano's book *The Human Journey: Thomas Merton, Symbol of a Century* (Garden City: Doubleday 1982), it is the idea of the wanderer that most often comes to mind in reference to Merton. It is, I believe, the way in which Merton reflects the late-modern (or some would say, postmodern) spiritual and intellectual pilgrim that resonates with Western people seeking to make sense of a world in which they sit uneasily after Hiroshima and Auschwitz. In strange ways, Merton reminds me of the comparisons between mystics and postmodern wanderers in the later writings on mysticism by the maverick Jesuit and French intellectual, Michel de Certeau who, much more overtly than Merton, chose by the end of his life to stand on the margins of the Christian Church.

All mystics, according to de Certeau, are 'drunk with desire' – drunk, that is, with what they do not possess. Because

of this, they merit the name given to the seventeenth-century mystic Angelus Silesius, that is, *Wandersmann*, the wanderer.

He or she is a mystic who cannot stop walking and, with the certainty of what is lacking, knows of every place and object that it is *not that*; one cannot stay *there* nor be content with *that*. Desire creates an excess. Places are exceeded, passed, lost behind it. It makes one go further, elsewhere. It lives nowhere. It is inhabited, Hadewijch also said, by

a noble *je ne sais quoi*,
neither this nor that,
that leads us, introduces us to and
absorbs us in our Origin (4).

To a greater or lesser extent (explicit in *The Seven Storey Mountain*, *The Sign of Jonas* and the diaries, and implicit in many other works) autobiography was Merton's chosen medium for writing – even when the focus was not really himself but monasticism or contemplation or a spirituality of social engagement. This means that the reader of Merton is always a companion on his inner or outer life journey. Even at his most 'specific' or settled, when baptized as a Catholic in 1938, Merton invited as baptismal witnesses three Jewish friends. That gesture carried forward with him his past but was also an intimation of the way that, even at his most Roman Catholic, the inherent openness to other traditions of belief and values was never lost.

There are different views of Merton's autobiographical style. Mary Jo Weaver (5) is uncomfortable with Merton's tendency to 'ask readers to find

themselves in his story', in contrast to Augustine or Teresa of Avila whose autobiographical classics invite the reader rather to see 'the mysterious action of God in their lives'. Although she does in the end believe that Merton is a spiritual giant this is almost despite, rather than because of, his preoccupation with 'the self' and the journey from inauthenticity to authenticity. In contrast, Lawrence Cunningham (6) suggests that Merton's personal narrative style was an anti-rationalist (one might almost say postmodern) strategy. That is, Merton was concerned to point out, through the use of narrative, that the Enlightenment, Cartesian, rationalist construction of the autonomous human ego was fatally flawed. In contrast he outlined the quest for a more authentic, healthy sense of the self. For this, the 'fluidity' of personal narrative was an effective medium.

To my mind, it was actually Merton's preoccupation with the self that was in many respects his greatest attraction to the late 20th century reader. He was the epitome of the contemporary preoccupation with a process of becoming, becoming our true selves. One of his most striking counter-intuitive moves was to suggest, by his lifestyle as much as by his writing, that we need to step aside from the pressures and expectations of others, of society and of surrounding culture, in order to seek the mysterious depths of our heart within. Having said that, I think we need to be cautious. The self is not a prepackaged, predetermined 'given' that merely has to be uncovered or discovered ready-made. Even if we believe, as the early monastic ascetics

did, that our identity is the one given us by God, not by social convention or through self-creation, there is also a sense in which that God-given self is always in process of becoming - is, if you like, a self shaped from the very start by our outward relationships. God-given identity is not incarnated directly in some kind of self-contained private interiority but rather comes to be within the complexity of our relationships, both interpersonal and social.

If we follow the thoughts of Lawrence Cunningham, Merton can be seen as opposed to a false, empirical, exterior-superficial, solipsistic self which is the centre of its own world. Like the Cartesian ego, such a self always fears uncertainty and the abyss. On the other hand, Merton positively sought another kind of self - the interior, hidden, real self - interior but at the same time a self capable of true dialogue and genuine encounter because it is not preoccupied with survival or self-importance.

This concern for the self and transformation actually illustrates very well the first of the two general points I now wish to make about Merton's contribution to spirituality, viz his *counter-cultural stance*. What is counter-cultural about Merton's quest for 'the self' is his growing conviction in the face of a prevailing individualistic culture that the self only truly exists *in communion*, in solidarity with others. One might say, too, that this self is also a *vulnerable* self, no longer protected behind walls of separation and spiritual superiority. That was one, important aspect of his second 'conversion experience' in downtown Louisville.

This sense of liberation from an illusory difference [between monastic life and ordinary people] was such a relief and such a joy to me that I almost laughed loud. And I suppose my happiness could have taken form in these words. 'Thank God, thank God that I *am* like other men; that I am only a man among others'. To think that for sixteen or seventeen years I have been taking seriously this pure illusion that is implicit in so much of our monastic thinking! (7)

First of all, however, what do I mean by counter-cultural? When Merton published *The Seven Storey Mountain* in 1948, his presuppositions were in terms of dichotomies or polar opposites, especially monastery versus world. Although Merton acknowledged that humans are in the image of God, he believed that he (and implicitly, all of us) was a prisoner of sinfulness, self-centredness and violence. This viewpoint was symptomatic of a violent and fractured world in the violent and fractured age in which he grew up (recall, he was born in the midst of World War I and entered Gethsemani in the midst of World War II). So, at that point, 'the world' was for Merton a human prison, framed by human egotism. In contrast, at the opposite pole, was 'interiority', the mystical-contemplative life. This is what drew him to the Cistercians. The monastery was an 'enclosed freedom' where people can learn how to be happy away from the flux and unreliability of the everyday world. For all that the book embarrassed the later Merton (and could be used by some traditionalist

Catholics to try to imprison him in the image of the classic monk), there is no question that it laid the foundations for a commitment to an absolutely counter-cultural, counter-intuitive relationship with God - what, in the more mature Merton, grew into a commitment to the renewal of the world in God.

By the time of *Life and Holiness* (New York: Doubleday Image 1964) he was writing in a very different language:

'The spiritual life is not a life of quiet withdrawal, a hothouse growth of artificial ascetic practices beyond the reach of people living ordinary lives. It is in the ordinary duties and labours of life that the Christian can and should develop his spiritual union with God....Christian holiness in our age means more than ever the awareness of our common responsibility to cooperate with the mysterious designs of God for the human race.' (pp 9-10)

Obviously, being counter-cultural could no longer stand for the simple polarisations of his original decision to enter Gethsemani and to embrace monastic life. Merton gradually came to understand the monk not as a person who withdrew from 'the world' but one whose contemplative solitude was to be understood as a radically 'other' way of being *in* the world with a responsibility in and for that world. Part of his renewed counter-cultural, prophetic stance at this stage was actually to risk isolation and unpopularity, not only from the great American public by his opposition to the Vietnam war and by his support for the Civil Rights

movement, but also from a section of the American Catholic Church (including some fellow monks) because of his rejection of his spiritual 'pin-up' image!

The posthumously edited *The Asian Journal* (London: Sheldon 1974) offers some related insights into Merton's later understanding of the monk as counter-cultural figure. First, in his final Bangkok paper (p 329) he suggests that 'the monk is essentially someone who takes up a critical attitude towards the contemporary world and its structures'. Then, in Appendix 4, the notes for a talk he gave in Calcutta, he offers three broad categories of the term 'monastic' - which he intended to be inclusive enough to embrace world religions and people who, more generally, 'lived in the spirit of monastic life'. First there is a certain distance or detachment from the secular concerns of a worldly life. Second there is a preoccupation with the radical inner depths of one's religious or philosophical beliefs and their spiritual implications. Third there is a special concern with inner transformation.

This returns us to the very different kinds of counter-cultural stance. These particularly relate us to different understandings of what it means for a monk to adopt a 'critical attitude towards the world and its structures'. This in turn governs how we understand the notion of detachment and then approach the business of inner transformation. While Merton as he entered Gethsemani clearly saw withdrawal as a rejection of the world, conceived as evil and violent, he later came to realise that such an attitude

completely undervalued the fundamental goodness of the created order - not to mention his own humanity. By 1966, Merton shared in the post Vatican II debate about the public, 'worldly' nature of faith. In an essay in *Commonweal* he suggested:

'To choose the world is not then merely a pious admission that the world is acceptable because it comes from the hand of God. It is first of all an acceptance of a task and a vocation in the world, in history and in time. To choose the world it is to choose to do the work I am capable of doing, in collaboration with my brother, to make the world better, more free, more just, more liveable, more human.

'The world cannot be a problem to anyone who sees that ultimately Christ, the world, his brother and his own inmost ground are made one and the same in grace and redemptive love.' (8)

To use the categories suggested by Richard Niebuhr in his book *Christ and Culture*, an analysis of different theological stances to 'the world' and to 'history', Merton moved from the world-rejecting model of 'Christ against culture' to the critical-conversion model of 'Christ the transformer of culture' (9). A world-rejecting spirituality actually undermines an effective counter-cultural or counter-intuitive witness. In the end, prophetic witness can only arise from the riskiness of a deep commitment rather than rejection, expressed in critical yet loving

engagement with the everyday world.

If, as I have suggested elsewhere, monasticism involves 'changing places', both geographically and metaphorically, the move to the margins or monastic 'distance' becomes a means of solidarity with social and political marginality. The monk is prepared to risk a loss of success, honour and material acquisitions. However, monastic 'hiddenness' does not mean a lack of visibility or a way of hiding away in self-protective isolation. Rather it implies an absence of self-promotion and disinterestedness in worldly accomplishment.

Fuga mundi, as a form of 'standing on the edges', is not only a way of solidarity but also opens up the possibility of prophetic speech. In the title of his last self-prepared journal, the posthumously published diary for 1964-65, *A Vow of Conversation* (10), Merton implies a play on the double meaning of the classic monastic vow (so difficult, so controversial to translate) *conversio*, or *conversatio morum*: a turning, a conversion or a speech (11). In the well-known 1980 edition of the Rule of St Benedict (12) it is noted that monastic copyists in earlier times preferred the simpler *conversio*. That could imply that the vow stood simply for conversion of one's behaviour. In Dom Cuthbert Butler's 1912 critical edition of the Rule, the text was changed back to what is now considered the original *conversatio*. In one sense, *conversatio* implies a way of life - or simply the monastic way. However, as the editors of the 1980 edition note (p 461), it may

be appropriate to link this, like the other vows, to certain things with which living under the Rule was intended to contrast. On this reading *conversatio* is what distinguishes the cenobitic monk from the unattached hermit. It implies living 'in association with others' or even, as with Thomas Merton, living in 'conversation'.

In *The Sign of Jonas*, Merton records a discussion (1947) with the then Abbot General of the Trappists, Dom Dominique Nogues, about the vow of *conversatio* where the Abbot interpreted it as an on-going quest to do always what is 'more perfect' (13). Merton understood *conversatio* as central to the monastic way, implying as it did for him a commitment to progress in the contemplative-mystical life by 'turning away' from the radically self-centred ego (a major preoccupation) (14) and, also, as he progressed in monastic life, a 'turning to' the world in order to engage in prophetic conversation with it. The monk was one who listened first and only then spoke out. 'Listening', 'watching', 'learning' lie at the heart of the Rule of St Benedict. The very first word of the text is 'Listen!' '*Obsculta, o fili, praecepta magistri, et inclina aurem cordis tui*' 'Listen carefully my son to the master's instructions and attend to them with the ear of your heart' (Prologue 1).

If the notion of being counter-cultural was my first theme, the connection between mysticism or contemplation and social transformation is my second and related theme. According to the Merton scholar William Shannon, the conflict between contemplation and

action is 'supposed' and a pseudo-problem (15). The difficulty is that the contrast between the two has a long pedigree and has frequently been incarnated in certain versions of monastic spiritual writing. For David Tracy, Thomas Merton is one of the key figures who marks the transition within the Catholic spiritual tradition towards what Tracy calls 'a new paradigm for Catholic spirituality: a mystico-prophetic model' (16). A major part of the (pseudo) problem has been a historical tendency to adopt an unbalanced rhetoric of interiority and to misunderstand what is implied by the 'turn inwards'.

There has been a tendency to blame St Augustine for initiating the prioritizing of interiority. Yet for St Augustine and other classic spiritual teachers the concept did not imply the same thing as it does in our modern era. The dangerous *rhetoric* of interiority, creating a dichotomy between inner and outer life, affected approaches to spirituality most acutely over the last two hundred years or so. This resulted from the influence of aspects of Enlightenment thinking (the priority of Descartes' autonomous thinking self, *Cogito ergo sum*) and the impact of late nineteenth-century psychology that lead to a fascination with personal subjective 'religious experience'. In writings on the pre-Conquest civilizations of Mexico, Merton eloquently expressed the state of this post-Enlightenment isolated 'ego':

For us, our 'self' tends to be 'realized' in a much more shadowy, abstract mental world [than 'archaic' people's sense of

identity], or indeed in a very abstract and spiritualised world of 'soul'. We are disembodied minds seeking to bridge the gap between mind and body and return to ourselves through the mediation of things, commodities, products and implements (17).

If we survey the western spiritual tradition as a whole, 'interiority' does *not* necessarily imply something inherently private, individualistic and detached. Indeed, the heart of Christian spirituality may be expressed in terms of a tension between 'interiority' and 'exteriority' - between the mystical-contemplative and transformative practice (the prophetic) (18). It was a desire to reinstate this dialectic that so strongly influenced the later Merton.

Although Merton's ways of expressing a reconnection of the contemplative-monastic way with social transformation are uniquely his, and very much of his time, he is far from isolated in the long tradition of Western mysticism. Contemplative mysticism has often been interpreted as the most radically interior form of Christian spirituality, yet the classic contemplative-mystical texts, properly understood, do not support this viewpoint. Evelyn Underhill suggests in her classic book *Mysticism* (19) that one defining characteristic of Christian mysticism is that union with God impels a person towards an active, outward, rather than purely passive, inward life (20). The most substantial representatives of western mysticism were opposed to private experience. Underhill cites, among others, the great Cistercian Bernard of Clairvaux. But

Underhill's favourite, the fourteenth-century Flemish writer Jan Ruusbroec, conceived the contemplative life as the life common to all. This common life joined created beings to each other in mutual service and thus harmonized the initially distinct moments of action and contemplation. Thus the spiritually elevated person is also the common person:

'A person who has been sent down by God from these heights is full of truth and rich in all the virtues...He will therefore always flow forth to all who need him, for the living spring of the Holy Spirit is so rich that it can never be drained dry...He therefore leads a common life, for he is equally ready for contemplation or for action and is perfect in both.' (21)

Ruusbroec was quite clear that people who practised the attainment of peaceful inwardness as the goal of prayer and disregarded charity or ethics were guilty of spiritual wickedness (22). This chimes with the Merton's sentiments in, for example, *Conjectures of a Guilty Bystander* which so powerfully affirmed that solitude and solidarity are deeply interconnected. In the language of Ruusbroec (incidentally, a monastic founder as well as mystical theologian), a monastery is not an escape from the 'common life' (or, life common to all), but a way of sharing in the life common to all.

Within liberation theology, the Chilean Segundo Galilea and the Brazilian Leonardo Boff have written particularly powerfully about the intimate

connection between a mystical-contemplative life and social responses to injustice. Galilea questions the notion that such responses are purely structural. Humans are not able to be truly compassionate, or genuinely transform structures without becoming part of Jesus' own compassion. In a context of social action, only contemplative-mystical practice is capable of bringing about the inner transformation needed for lasting solidarity - particularly a solidarity that is capable of embracing the oppressor as well as the oppressed (23).

Boff sharply criticizes the traditional spiritual formula of prayer and work (*ora et labora*) on the grounds that it espouses a kind of parallelism: it presupposes that contemplation alone is the source of value. Practice does not directly mediate God but has value to the extent that it is fed by contemplation. This conceptual framework implies that the uniquely spiritual nature of prayer redeems the natural profaneness of action (24). In some contemporary thinking, dominated by social or political theory, this parallelism continues to exist but in reverse. Thus, practice takes precedence over contemplation, which becomes merely another, subsidiary, form of practice. Boff argues for an equal, dialectical relationship (25), and even coins a new phrase for this - *contemplativus in liberatione*, a unity of prayer-liberation based on a living faith in God existing in all things (26). Thus the mystical-contemplative life "is not carried out only in the sacred space of prayer, nor in the sacred precinct of the church; purified, sustained and nurtured by living faith, it also finds its place in

political and social practice.” (27)

As I have already suggested, Merton's later approach to the marginality of monasticism was a vulnerable act of solidarity with other marginal people. The contemplative monk was a kind of social and political critic.

Monastic disengagement from the start was a social and political statement as well as a theological one (28). The lives of Anthony of Egypt and Simeon Stylites, representative figures of Egyptian and Syrian-Palestinian asceticism, remind us that the holy men and women of the early Christian centuries did not leave social or public roles behind entirely. Especially in Syria, ascetics continued to live close to human habitation and remained visible challenges near where people lived. Their often wildly eccentric lifestyles (e.g. Simeon and others living on pillars) seemed to deliberately challenge convention (29). In general, by standing both socially and geographically on the margins, the early ascetics were frequently accepted as spiritual guides and even at times took on the roles of local leadership or of social arbitrator (30). In a sense, Merton seems to be offering a reinterpretation of this ancient role.

The contemplative, in other words, has a strange and paradoxical power to confront the world of false consciousness. For Merton the unmasking of illusion came to be the special mark of the monk or those who, more broadly, followed ‘the monastic way’. Through solitude and inner struggle, the monk listens more deeply to the hidden voices of the world (31).

Merton was very struck by the meditations of Fr Alfred Delp, the German Jesuit tortured and imprisoned by the Nazis. His comments on Delp show how he shared Delp's sense that solitude, silence and contemplation were the contexts where the great issues facing humankind are worked through. Authentic contemplation confronts us with reality and Merton was clear that this bore no relation to the narcissism of a bogus interiority which is an evasion of conflict and struggle (32).

The monastic way of speaking that arises from this contemplative listening bears a close resemblance to the sentiments expressed in the later writings of Merton's younger contemporary, the French cultural theorist and maverick Jesuit Michel de Certeau. In his essay ‘The weakness of believing’ (*La faiblesse de croire*) de Certeau suggests that in a world where the Church no longer dominates western culture and where ‘strong’ dogmatic statements are no longer heeded, the Christian is left to bear witness by faithfully following the way of Jesus as a prophetic ‘presence-in-the-world’. Yet this ‘weakness’ has a paradoxical power. The Christian (and, one might say, the monk) journeys with no security apart from the story of Christ which is enacted rather than dogmatically stated and yet, in its ‘performance’, is profoundly disruptive (33).

Finally, the intimate and necessary connection between contemplation and social engagement is perhaps most clearly and succinctly expressed in Thomas Merton's introduction to the Latin American edition of his writings

(prematurely titled *Obras Completas*!) as early as 1958. Just three quotations will suffice:

Contemplation cannot construct a new world by itself....

But

Without contemplation we cannot understand the significance of the world in which we must act....

And finally

Without contemplation, without the intimate silent, secret pursuit of truth through love, our action loses itself in the world and becomes dangerous....

1. See Gordon Mursell, ed., *The Story of Christian Spirituality: Two Thousand Years from East to West*. Oxford: Lion Publishing 2001, p 340.
2. On the nature of ‘classics’ see, David Tracy, *The Analogical Imagination: Christian Theology and the Culture of Pluralism*. New York: Crossroad, 1991, especially Chapter 3.
3. See Jean Leclercq, Preface, in Thomas Merton, *Contemplation in a World of Action*. New York: Doubleday Image 1973, p 12.
4. Michel de Certeau, *The Mystic Fable*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press 1992, p 299. The citation is from the 13th century Beguine mystic Hadewijch in her collected mystical writings.
5. Mary Jo Weaver ‘Conjectures of a Disenchanted Reader’, *Horizons* 30/2 (2003), pp 285-96.
6. Lawrence S. Cunningham *Thomas Merton and the Monastic Vision*. Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Co 1999, especially Chapter 7 ‘Summing up a life’.

7. Thomas Merton, *Conjectures of a Guilty Bystander*. New York: Doubleday 1966, p 141.
8. Thomas Merton, ‘Is the world a problem?’, *Commonweal* 84 (June 3rd 1966), pp 307 & 309.
9. H. Richard Niebuhr, *Christ and Culture*. New York: Harper & Row 1975 edition.
10. Thomas Merton, *A Vow of Conversation. Diary 1964-65*, ed. Naomi Button Stone. New York: Farrar, Strauss 1988.
11. This play on words is affirmed by Merton's editor, Naomi Burton Stone, in her Preface, pp x-xi, to *A Vow of Conversation: Journals 1964-1965*. New York: Farrar Straus Giroux 1988. The notion that Merton sought to link the vow to speaking to the world is also noted in Lawrence Cunningham *Thomas Merton and the Monastic Vision*. Grand Rapids: Wm B. Eerdmans 1999, p 206.
12. Timothy Fry OSB, ed., *The Rule of St Benedict. In Latin and English with notes*. Collegeville: The Liturgical Press 1981.
13. Thomas Merton, *The Sign of Jonas*. New York: Harcourt Brace & Co 1981 edition, p 36.
14. On Merton's preoccupation with ‘the self’ and the transformation of the self away from radical self-obsession, see Anne E. Carr, *A Search for Wisdom and Spirit: Thomas Merton's Theology of the Self*. Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press 1988.
15. See his entry on ‘Contemplation, Contemplative Prayer’ in Michael Downey, ed., *The New Dictionary of Catholic Spirituality*. Collegeville: The Liturgical Press 1993.
16. David Tracy, ‘Recent Catholic spirituality: unity amid diversity’ in Louise Dupré & Don Saliers, eds.,

Christian Spirituality III: Post-Reformation and Modern. New York: The Crossroad Publishing Co. 1989, p 164.

17. Thomas Merton, *Ishi means man*. Greensboro NC: Unicorn Press 1976, p 65.

18. On the dialectic of interiority and exteriority in Christian spirituality, see Philip Sheldrake, 'Christian spirituality as a way of living publicly: A dialectic of the mystical and the prophetic', *Spiritus: A Journal of Christian Spirituality* 3/1 Spring 2003, pp 19-37.

19. Evelyn Underhill, *Mysticism: The Nature and Development of Spiritual Consciousness* (Oxford: One World Publications 1993).

20. Underhill, *Mysticism*, 172. On this point see 172-74.

21. John Ruusbroec, "The Sparkling Stone," Conclusion, ET, *John Ruusbroec: The Spiritual Espousals and Other Works*, ed. James Wiseman (New York: Paulist Press, 1985), 184.

22. Ruusbroec, *The Spiritual Espousals*, 136-43.

23. Segundo Galilea, "The Spirituality of Liberation," *The Way* (July, 1985), 186-94.

24. Leonardo Boff, "The Need for Political Saints: From a Spirituality of Liberation to the Practice of Liberation,"

ET *Cross Currents* (XXX/4 Winter 1980/81), 371.

25. Boff, "Political Saints," 373.

26. Boff, "Political Saints," 372.

27. Boff, "Political Saints," 374.

28. See Peter Brown, *The Making of Late Antiquity*. Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press 1994, Chapter 4.

29. See Peter Brown, *Society and the Holy in Late Antiquity*. Berkeley: University of California Press 1989, pp 110-114.

30. Brown, *Society and the Holy*, 'The rise and function of the holy man in late antiquity'.

31. See *Contemplative Prayer*. London: Darton Longman & Todd 1973, p 25.

32. See Merton's commentary on Delp in *Faith and Violence*. Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press 1968, e.g. p 52. On bogus interiority, see *Contemplative Prayer* p 135.

33. See 'The weakness of believing: From the body to writing, a Christian transit' in *The Certeau Reader*, ed. Graham Ward, Oxford: Blackwell 2000.

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from Merton's letter to Jim Forest

"The next step in the process is for you to see that your own thinking about what you are doing is crucially important. You are probably striving to build yourself an identity in your work, out of your work and your witness. You are using it, so to speak, to protect yourself against nothingness, annihilation. That is not the right use of your work. All the good that you will do will come not from you but from the fact that you have allowed yourself, in the obedience of faith, to be used by God's love. Think of this more, and gradually you will be free from the need to prove yourself, and you can be more open to the power that will work through you without your knowing it..."