Thomas Merton & Christian de Chergé: A shared interfaith vision

Stephen Dunhill

Introduction

Christian de Chergé is hardly a household name, but many are familiar with his story through his depiction in the 2010 film *Of Gods and Men*.[1] As the prior of the Trappist monastery of Our Lady of Atlas in Algeria, he was one of the 7 monks who, having made the fateful decision to stay with the local people despite terrorist threats, were kidnapped and subsequently murdered in 1996. Throughout his monastic life Christian strove tirelessly to deepen his knowledge of Islam, and to seek unity between Christians and Muslims, seeking every opportunity for Islamic-Christian dialogue. His approach shows much affinity with Merton's interfaith dialogue, though Merton had a much wider vision that embraced many more religious traditions than solely Islam. In this paper I will examine not only their shared vision, but also where their paths diverged.

Christian de Chergé

Born in France in 1937, de Chergé spent part of his childhood in Algiers where his father was commander of an artillery regiment.[2] His mother was extremely pious, and from the age of 8 he felt that he had a calling for the religious life. Moving to Paris at the age of 10, he showed exceptional promise as a student. He entered a seminary in Paris at the age of 19 but was called up for military service 3 years later, and was stationed as a staff officer in the Algerian city of Tiaret. By now the Algerian War for Independence was 5 years old, won by the French militarily but lost politically. He befriended a village policemen, Mohammed, with whom he had soul-baring walks. Ambushed on one of these walks, Mohammad saved de Chergé's life, insisting to the terrorists that, like them, he was a

godly man and a friend of Muslims. The terrorists withdrew, but the next day Mohammed was found with his throat cut. Mohammed's act, the gift of love freely given, profoundly marked his calling, and confirmed him in his desire to live and follow Christ in Algeria.[3]

Ordained in Paris in 1964 he served as a chaplain at Sacré-Coeur in Montmartre until 1969, when he entered the novitiate at Aguibelle Abbey, thereafter in 1971 joining the Atlas Abbey in Tibhirine. The enthusiasm of this self-assured young monk, seeking the meaning of Christ's presence in a Muslim world, was not shared with the other monks, educated in a pre-Vatican II world, who saw little point in him learning Arabic. He divided the community. So he was given a 2 year leave of absence to study at the Papal Institute of Islamic and Arabic Studies in Rome. He returned to the abbey as guestmaster, where he hung a sign on the door, 'Muslims welcome for retreat here.'[4] In his own eyes he had come to Algeria to live in spiritual communion with Islam; to the other monks he had 'gone native', aligning himself too closely with the local Muslim population. He took his final vows in 1976, the next day presenting his fellow-monks with a long written credo of his faith which included such statements as, 'The prayer of the monk and that of the Muslim have a common spiritual parentage which must be more celebrated.'[5] But difficulties with the other monks persisted, and he came to doubt his place in the community. In 1979 he was given permission to go on retreat to Assekrem, the hermitage of Charles de Foucauld. He returned 2 months later, smiling, emaciated, and confirmed in his vocation as a Trappist monk.[6]

Due to the worsening political conditions the number of monks remaining had gradually fallen. In 1984, the community now only consisting of 11, the status of the Abbey was reduced to that of a Priory, and Christian was elected its superior. Gradually the other monks came to share his vision, amongst them the youngest, Christophe, who had been a radical student in Paris in 1968. At his ordination in January 1990, the Bishop of Algiers, Henri Teissier, who shared de Chergé's vision and gave the monastery much encouragement, spoke for them all:

> There is a certain insanity about celebrating this ordination in a Muslim country. With our priesthood, we are foreign in the eyes of Islam which does not recognise in principle the mediation between man and God. ... But the Church receives this mediation not only for itself but for the whole world. On the surface, we live in a spiritual reality unrelated to Islam.

> But in actuality, this which Christophe has just received is profoundly connected to the purpose of our Church – to be a Church for Muslims. Christ's mediation is universal. We are priests in the Christian community, but the Christian community is a priesthood for all people.[7]

By now Islamic fundamentalism threatened Algeria. The political situation became ever more complex and increasingly violent.[8] The civil war erupted in 1991 with armed fundamentalist Islamic groups fighting for position. There were also attacks and murders of foreign monks and priests though Tibhirine was not affected. In June that year Bernardo Olivera, the Abbott General of the Trappist Order, visited Tibhirine to give moral support to the community; and 2 years later in 1993, he persuaded de Chergé to address the General Chapter meeting of the Order, with representatives of 170 Trappist communities at Poyo in Spain. Many of the assembled abbots from grand European foundations thought he was not a good choice, this head of a tiny oddball monastery surrounded by Muslims talking of Islam. The Cistercian Order had shown, from its inception, little interest, if indeed hostility and suspicion, towards Muslims. Only 50 years after its foundation Pope Eugene III had commissioned Bernard to preach the Second Crusade. Thus de Chergé's reception must have been somewhat akin to Merton's when he had talked of Marxism to abbots from countries battling against Communism in Bangkok 25 years earlier.

The immunity of the monastery from the ongoing turmoil was due to several factors. First of all the monks' own witness, living a life of poverty, working alongside their Muslim helpers in the monastery fields, and keeping regular hours of prayer. Also the dedication of the monastery to Mary was signified by a large statue of The Virgin on a hill above the monastery, which was of great significance to the local Muslims, Mary holding a revered place in Islam as the only woman named in the Quran in which she is identified as the greatest of all women. The oldest of the monks, Brother Luc, was the community's doctor, who treated all who came to his door, including soldiers and armed insurgents. The monastery in such matters remained neutral, siding neither with the 'brothers of the mountains' nor the 'brothers of the plains'.[9]

In October 1993 the GIA, one of the most extreme groups, gave all foreigners 30 days to leave the country or face assassination. In the face of such a threat the monks resolved to stay as they felt that if they left they would never return. On Christmas Eve 1996, three armed men

entered the monastery demanding medical help and money. Christian was outraged, taking them outside and telling the intruders that they were celebrating the birth of Jesus, the son of Mary, called by Christians the Prince of Peace. They left but the community was rattled, and following discussions with Bishop Teissier, two monks left.[10] It was after this event that Christian wrote his profound and prophetic Testament which he sent to his brother to be opened in the event of his death.[11]

The situation in the country gradually deteriorated. Nuns and priests were murdered, and the church in Algeria was shrinking, riddled with departures and small congregations closing their doors. The constant fear felt by all the monks drew them closer together, making them more attentive to one another. For any given horror there were many suspects: terrorists, government forces, local self-defence militias, bandits, and people settling grudges. In Easter 1996 Christian led a retreat at the Diocesan House. In his discourse he gave five pillars of behaviour that must be practiced daily to have peace: patience, poverty, presence, prayer, forgiveness. And speaking on behalf of his community he affirmed:

> Our witness is here in Algeria. The only way for us to give witness is to live where we do, and to be what we are in the midst of banal, everyday realities. ... One way for us to live in accordance with [our] vocation inaugurated by Jesus is to make sure the words of our faith correspond with our action.[12]

During the night of March 26, 1996, armed men entered the monastery and kidnapped seven monks including Christian, Christophe and Luc. Three weeks later, the group GIA issued a communiqué offering to free the monks in return for the freeing of their prisoners. On May 23 they announced that the monks were dead, the bodies being found, beheaded, on May 30th. They were given grand funerals at the cathedral in Algiers, a ceremony quite out of keeping with the simple life of the monks. They were buried at Tibhirine. Christian's testimony was published in the local newpapers, and thousands of ordinary Muslims responded, with expressions of the widespread feeling of shame and sense of loss.[13]

The biggest Sufi in Kentucky

Merton's interest in Islam seems to have started in 1958 through correspondence with the American writer, Hebert Mason, through whom

he started correspondence with Louis Massignon.[14] It was Massignon, a Catholic scholar of Islam, who is credited with bringing the wisdom of Islam to the West. For Merton his interest centred primarily on Sufism which resonated so strongly with his own ideas of contemplation, in particular the works of al-Hallaj. It was Massignon who put the student of Sufism, Abdul Aziz, in contact with Merton; and their rich correspondence has been described by Sidney H Griffith as 'one of the most interesting epistolary exchanges between a Muslim and a Christian in the twentieth century'.[15] Although Merton never wrote an essay on Sufism, let alone a whole book, he gave conferences on Sufism to the novices, and to contemplative sisters in the summer of 1968, which were taped;[16] and Islamic and Sufi themes provided the inspiration for at least 6 of his poems. For Merton, in Sufism he found common ground with the call for union with God, so central to his monastic calling. It was through the language and concepts of Sufism that Merton was able to find expression for the seemingly inexpressible. He took from al-Hallaj, through Massignon, the term, *le point vierge*, to help him articulate and expand on the meaning of his experience at 'Fourth and Walnut' in *Conjectures of a Guilty Bystander*.[17] And in the extended letter he wrote to Aziz in January 1966 in response to his request about his method of meditation, he wrote:

> Strictly speaking I have a very simple way of prayer. It is centered entirely on attention to the presence of God and to his Will and to his Love. That is to say it is centered on *faith* by which alone we can know the presence of God. One might say this gives my meditation the character described by the Prophet as 'being before God as if you saw Him'. ... My prayer tends very much toward what you call *fana* ['annihilation']. There is in my heart this great thirst to recognize totally the nothingness of all that is not God. My prayer then is a kind of praise rising up and out of the centre of Nothing and Silence.[18]

Such was his immersion in Sufism in the early 1960s that he could write in a letter to Ad Reinhardt in October 1963, 'I am the biggest Sufi in Kentucky, though I admit there is not much competition.'[19]

This phrase also captures Merton's predicament. In his isolated rural monastery there was little opportunity for personal contact with like-minded scholars – and so his interests were fostered largely through

books and through his correspondence. But at the end of October 1966, Sidi Abdesalam, a Sufi master from Algeria, came to Gethsemani. Merton was very moved by this 'momentous visit'. Afterwards he wrote down his impressions of this meeting with 'a true man of God':

> A real experience of Sufism. I now see exactly what it is all about. Close to monastic spirit. Very close indeed in simplicity, spontaneity, joy, truth. ... Sense of God present in us, with us, in friendship. ... Above all, importance of knowing and following the voice of one's own heart, one's own secret: God in us.[20]

Living in an Islamic world

In their explorations of Islam, for both Massignon and Merton, their focus was primarily on its mystical aspects. But for Christian de Chergé, living in a Muslim country, he was far more aware of the day-to-day aspects of Islam. And for all his learning de Chergé was a practical man, much occupied with the running of the monastery. Like Merton he had little opportunity for personal contact with scholars, but increasingly his community were of one mind in sharing his vision for strengthening the links between Christianity and Islam. He gave over one of the buildings within the monastery to be used as a mosque by the local people and visiting Muslims, and the sound of the bell calling the community to prayer mingled with that of the muezzin on their doorstep. In his chapter meetings Islamic topics were regularly discussed. In 1979 Christian helped form a group of Christians from all over Algeria called Ribât-al-Salam (The Bond of Peace) who gathered together twice a year at Tibhirine to widen their knowledge and experience of Islam. They were joined the following year by a group of Sufis, who told Christian, 'We feel called by God to do something together with you. But we are not interested in theology. Theology raises barriers between people. Let God invent something new between us. Love is what brings people together. And without bonds there can be no peace.'[21] But in the eyes of some members of the Catholic church Sufis were not considered part of the Islamic mainstream. Many Muslims consider Sufis heretics, believing as they do in an accessible God of love with whom to be united, rather than stressing the inner peace that comes through submission to the will of God. Conscious of these views, Christian members of the *ribât* asked ordinary Muslims from the local community to join the group. These meetings continued until 1993 when, due to the GIA threats against

foreigners, they were suspended. It did not reconvene at Tibhirine until the day before the abduction of the 7 monks in 1996, when 12 members of the group were staying overnight in the monastery guest house.

From vision to practice

As mentioned earlier, Christian 'went native', too native for many of the older conservative monks. He followed the Muslim custom of removing his sandals on entering the chapel. Once a week he gave talks to the monks, giving the Islamic point of view on some topic such as death, prayer, Adam and Eve, or the Virgin Mary. For his prayer life, he claimed that, 'it is possible to do *lectio divina* using the Koran, especially in Arabic, which is so close to the milieu of our own scriptures.'[22] He assiduously kept Ramadan which he considered to be the Muslim Lent, neither drinking nor eating between dawn and dusk, seeing it as an opportunity to draw closer to the local people. As he observed:

> Thus at the time of Ramadan or of feasts, there is always something to share together. We have little Arabic in our liturgy, but our intercessions at the Hours and the Eucharist, especially on Friday, are marked by a more spiritual form of sharing. Bell and muezzin, whose calls to prayer rise, as you know, from the same enclosure, join together to bid us come to prayer, further than words can say.[23]

But due to objections from some of the community, several of his more radical proposals were rejected as being too divisive – an alternative service with an Arab liturgy, and the expunging from the Offices of certain psalms, those with reference to Israel and the 'enemies of the Lord', as possibly causing offence to Muslims. For the latter the monks would not agree to alter all that they held dear, pointing out that it is clearly written in the Koran that God gave the psalms to David. He did replace the crucifix in the chapel with one that was less offensive to Muslims. He felt that to depict a dead hanging Jesus was to show a lack of respect for one of God's great prophets. The new crucifix showed Jesus with a crown of thorns, dressed in a tunic of royal purple, the nails transformed into golden points of light, a dignified face looking ahead without suffering, all surmounted by the words 'He is risen' in Arabic.[24]

Merton and Aziz

The correspondence between Merton and Aziz started in 1960, and from

the start they both adopted the practice of praying for one another at dawn, mentioning this frequently in their letters. As Merton wrote at the end of January, 1961:

> I value most highly the prayers you have offered and, I hope, continue to offer sometimes, for me at the hour of dawn when the world is silent and the new light is most pure, symbolizing the dawning of divine light in the stillness of our hearts. I am sure that much good has come to me because of your prayer and I have also prayed for you at the same time.[25]

But in contrast with de Chergé's strivings to integrate Christian and Muslim worship, for Merton there were limits. In 1965 Aziz wrote to Merton – the letter is now lost – exhorting him to chant the Koran daily. He replied:

> It would not be right for me to chant the Koran daily, as I do not know how it ought to be done properly, and I do not simply want to go in for improvisation in so serious a matter. It seems to me that here again, my task is rather to chant the sacred books of my own tradition, the Psalms, the Prophets, etc., since I know the proper way of doing this. But on the other hand I read the Koran with deep attention and reverence.[26]

At the end of 1964 he asked Aziz for the date of Ramadan as he 'would like to join spiritually with the Muslim world in this act of love, faith and obedience towards Him Whose greatness and mercy surrounds us at all times.'[27] And in January 1966 he would tell Aziz: 'I am united with you in prayer during this month of Ramadan and will remember you on the Night of Destiny.'[28] The Night of Destiny celebrates the end of Ramadan, and commemorates the giving of the Koran to Mohammed. Merton used the phrase as the title of one of his Islamic poems, with opening lines:

> In my ending is my meaning
> Says the season.[29]

Texts

Merton's written output is extensive – books, journals, correspondence,

poetry, lecture notes – but little by de Chergé has been published, let alone in English translation. The only cited published work by de Chergé is from 1974, the dissertation, 'L'Algérie devant Dieu' (Algeria before God), he wrote following his studies at the Rome Institute of Arabic Studies. Since his death the Cistercian Abbey of Aiguebelle in France where de Chergé was a novice has formed an extensive archive relating to Tibhirine; and has published in French several volumes of de Chergé's writings, including a volume of his homilies and one of his chapter talks. To date none of the extensive notes kept by de Chergé and others relating to the meetings of the Ribât-al-Salam (The Bond of Peace) have been published.

Fortunately the text of the address de Chergé gave to the General Chapter meeting in Poyo in 1993 has been published in an English translation.[30] In it he tried to encapsulate some of his ideas and beliefs, particularly those relating to his interaction with Islam; and so I want now to examine some of the key points arising from this talk.

Cistercian contemplative identity

De Chergé was asked to talk on 'Cistercian contemplative identity', an expression he didn't like because it implied that contemplation had a fixed state. To his mind, 'contemplation is either a seeking or it is nothing. Here on earth, it is a journey, a tension, a permanent exodus.' And he goes on, in words that echo with so much of Merton's own contemplative journey:

> Our Christian identity is always in the process of being born. It is a Paschal identity. Is it not the same for our Cistercian identity? Would it still be contemplative if it was afraid to meet new horizons? By this is meant, of course, the horizons of modern times; but it also means the search for God beyond the well-worn paths of Christianity.

In a predominantly Muslim country Christianity, in particular that of the Catholic Church, was closely associated with the colonial French. And Christians certainly seem to take little heed of their religion. Writing of his own family in his semi-autobiographical novel *The First Man*, Camus captures this well: 'For them ... religion was part of their civic life, and that alone. They were Catholic as they were French; it entailed a certain number of rituals. Actually those rituals numbered exactly four: baptism, First Communion, marriage (if they were married), and funeral rites.

Between these ceremonies ... they were occupied with other things.'[31] But most priests, monks and nuns were highly regarded for their sacrificial work as teachers, doctors, and for standing alongside the poor and dispossessed. In the eyes of their neighbours at Tibhirine, the monks were definitely holy men. As de Chergé points out in his talk, there is no word for monk in Arabic; and so their neighbours can only view them using their own religious points of reference:

> There are those values that animate Islam and which we also ordinarily expect to find among monks: ritual prayer, prayer of the heart (*dhikr*), fasting , vigils, almsgiving, a sense of praise and of God's forgiveness, a naked faith in the glory of the Wholly-Other, and in the communion of saints. This last mystery, so essential to us, reveals a place of encounter, but no idea on how we can get there.

Merton's own Cistercian identity was constantly evolving. By the time he moved into the hermitage, his engagement with the world led him to lead a life that, on the surface at least, hardly fitted the image of a monk in most people's mind. But as he wrote to Patrick Hart from Alaska in September 1968, 'Give my regards to all the gang and I hope there are not too many crazy rumours. Keep telling everyone that I am a monk of Gethsemani and intend to remain one all my days.'[32] His identification with the world and its problems, first captured in his writing when he describes his 'Fourth and Walnut' experience, gradually led him to a place where he almost moved beyond any formal labels of identity. So, in 1963, he could start a humorous poem:

> White-collar man blue-collar
> Man I am a no-collar man
> (least of all a *Roman* collar!)[33]

We can catch this idea in Merton's writings as far back as 1949 when he wrote in *Seeds of Contemplation*: 'Our vocation is not simply to be, but to work together with God in the creation of our own life, our own identity, our own destiny ... to share with God the work of creating the truth of our identity.'[34] And at the end of his life these ideas resonated so strongly with those advanced by his Iranian correspondent, Reza Arasteh, in his book *Final Integration in the Adult Personality*. Talking of the book and its author to a group of nuns in Alaska, Merton said: 'He goes into the Sufist

mysticism and its purpose – he calls it final integration – a final unification in which the person becomes fully and completely himself as he is intended to be.'[35] And in an extended essay, 'Final Integration', he wrote:

> The man who has attained final integration is no longer limited by the culture in which he has grown up. He has experienced qualities of every type of life: ordinary human existence, intellectual life, artistic creation, human love, religious life. He passes beyond all these limiting forms, while retaining all that is best and most universal in them.'[36]

By the end of their lives both de Chergé and Merton, in their search for God, had gone far beyond the 'well-worn paths of Christianity'.

Inter-religious Dialogue

In his paper to have been delivered in Calcutta in 1968, 'Monastic Experience and East-West Dialogue', Merton brings out five key principles for inter-religious dialogue, all of them exemplified in the lives of de Chergé and Merton.[37]

The first of these is that one has to be firmly grounded in one's own tradition. Merton saw that with only a superficial grasp of one's own – a situation we see often today - one could hardly appreciate any other tradition. As Merton warned in a letter to Lord Northbourne: 'The great danger at the moment is a huge muddling and confusing of the spiritual traditions that still survive.'[38] And of course exposure to other traditions, if one is not so firmly grounded, has its own inherent problems. But, with their years of monastic training, with their firm grounding in their Christian faith, de Chergé and Merton were moving out confidently from a safe place.

The second principle is that one has to recognise that none of us has the whole truth. For Merton this meant listening to 'the voice of the stranger', for accepting that in return for giving one's own truth, one must be prepared to accept another's truth.[39]

Thirdly one has to respect the integrity of the other. There will be difficulties and points of disagreement, but these cannot be glossed over. Dwelling on such matters simply leads to useless debate and a pointless waste of time arguing over the differences. In his talk at Poyo de Chergé captures this point exactly:

> It is always rather painful to see a man of prayer, a man with an interior life, being held up by faith-statements in a dialogue with another tradition and be kept by their disagreements from seeking in the other the heights and depths of openness to the Spirit in himself and in Islam.

This agreeing to disagree, to lay aside discussion about points of difference, leads to Merton's fourth principle: That contemplation is a common experience available to all, that it moves beyond dialogue, beyond words, and thus could form a common meeting ground for all. Merton explored this experience widely in his life and writings through many spiritual traditions; but for de Chergé his experience was solely that of Islam, in particular the Sufist tradition. Like Merton and de Chergé, the Sufi's who came to the *ribât* at Tibhirine grasped this point. In his talk de Chergé bore witness to this openness of heart:

> The first time a neighboring Sufi community asked to meet with us - it was Christmas 1979 - the spokesman took care to say that they had come to us to share about prayer. 'We would rather not,' he said, 'begin a theological dialogue with you, for man-made barriers often arise. We feel we are called by God to unity. We must therefore allow God to start something new between us. This can only happen through prayer.'

Merton's final principle, bringing together all the themes of his talk, is that if we take this seriously, questions of traditional forms of institution, rules, structures and modes of observance, all fade away, and no longer become the focus of our attention, leaving us free to grow towards full maturity. As he wrote in his circular letter of September 1968, 'Our real journey in life is interior: it is a matter of growth, deepening, and of an ever greater surrender to the creative action of love and grace in our hearts.'[40] Embarking on this interior journey, one can be led, in Merton's words, to a 'place of inner transcendent freedom'. [41]

Conclusion

What motive lay behind Merton's and de Chergé's explorations outside of their faith? In his talk in Calcutta Merton saw himself as 'a Western monk who is pre-eminently concerned with his own monastic calling and dedication' but also as one who has who embarked as a pilgrim into

exploring other spiritual traditions to become 'a better and more enlightened monk'.[42] For de Chergé, his burning curiosity about Islam focused ultimately on wanting to know the place of Islam in God's plans. As he wrote in the penultimate paragraph of his testimony, foreshadowing his own death:

> But such people should know my death will satisfy my most burning curiosity will be set free. At last, I will be able – if God pleases - to see the children of Islam as He sees them, illuminated in the glory of Christ, sharing in the gift of God's Passion and of the Spirit, whose secret joy will always be to bring forth our common humanity amidst our differences.[43]

And with what openness of heart, he ends his testament with lines addressed to the terrorist who will take his life:

> And to you, too, my friend of the last moment, who will not know what you are doing. Yes, for you, too, I wish this thank-you, this 'A-Dieu', whose image is in you also, that we may meet in heaven, like happy thieves, if it pleases God, our common Father. Amen! Insha Allah![44]

Merton and de Chergé both recognized the vital importance of inter-faith dialogue, but that there were few with the spiritual maturity and insight to undertake it seriously. At Poyo, de Chergé quotes from the Muslim spokeman of the ribât: 'There are few Muslims who would understand. Then, too, only a few Christians would believe it.' But its importance was emphasised by Merton in his Calcutta paper:

> I am convinced that communication in depth, across the lines that have hitherto divided religious and monastic traditions, is now not only possible and desirable, but most important for the destinies of Twentieth-Century Man.[45]

Camus wrote in his essay, 'The Unbeliever', 'Between the forces of terror and the forces of dialogue, a great unequal battle has begun. I have nothing but reasonable illusions as to the outcome of that battle. But I believe it must be fought, and I know that certain men at least have resolved to do so.'[46] De Chergé and Merton were such men.

Notes

1. *Of Gods and Men* – French drama film, 2010, directed by Xavier Beauvois. Its original French title is *Des hommes et des dieux*. It won the Grand Prix at the 2010 Cannes Film Festival.
2. The principal source I have used for all the details of de Chergé's life and the events at Tibhirine, including the wider political and religious background, are taken from John W. Kiser, *The Monks of Tibhirine – Faith, Love and Terror in Algeria* (New York: Saint Martin's Press, 2002).
3. *The Monks of Tibhirine*, pp. 8-9.
4. *The Monks of Tibhirine*, p. 45.
5. *The Monks of Tibhirine*, p. 48.
6. *The Monks of Tibhirine*, pp. 50-52.
7. *The Monks of Tibhirine*, p. 73.
8. For a detailed examination of a very complex situation see: Luis Martinez, *The Algerian Civil War, 1990-1998*, trans. Jonathan Derrick (London: C Hurst & Co Publishers Ltd, 2000).
9. *The Monks of Tibhirine*, p. 176.
10. *The Monks of Tibhirine*, pp. 145-155.
11. *The Monks of Tibhirine*, pp. 244-246. The testament is also included in: Bernardo Olivera, *How Far to Follow? – The Martyrs of Atlas* (Petersham, Mass: St. Bede's Publicatios,1997), pp. 127-129. This volume by the Abbot General of the Cistercian Order of the Strict Observance includes the order's official documents relating to the events at Tibhirine, and examines the meaning of the seven monks' martyrdom.
12. *The Monks of Tibhirine*, p. 218.
13. *The Monks of Tibhirine*, pp. 234-247. The 7 murdered monks of Tibhirine were beatified with 12 other Algerian martyrs on December 8, 2018.
14. Thomas Merton, *Witness to Freedom: Letters in Times of Crisis*, William H Shannon, ed. (New York: Farrar Strauss Giroux, 1994), pp. 275-281.
15. Sidney H. Griffith, '"As one Spiritual man to Another" – The Merton-Abdul Aziz Correspondence', *Merton and Sufism – The Untold Story*, Rob Baker & Gray Henry, ed. (Louisville, KY: Fons Vitae, 1999), pp. 101-102. Merton's letters to Aziz are included in: Thomas Merton, *The Hidden Ground of Love*, William H Shannon, ed. (London: Collins Flame, 1990), pp. 43-67.
16. Selected excerpts from the tapes, transcribed by Bernadette Dieker, are included in *Merton and Sufism – The Untold Story*, 130-162. A set of recordings of 13 lectures, *Thomas Merton on Sufism*, are available from Learn25 at www.learn25.com.
17. Thomas Merton, Conjectures of a Guilty Bystander (London: Sheldon Press, 1977), p. 155.
18. Letter of January 2, 1966 in *The Hidden Ground of Love*, pp. 63-64.
19. Letter of October 31, 1963 in: Thomas Merton, *The Road to Joy*, Robert E Daggy, ed. (London: Collins Flame, 1990), p. 281.
20. See journal entry for October 31, 1966 in: Thomas Merton, *Learning to Love – The Journals of Thomas Merton* vol. 6 1966-1967, Christine Bochen, ed. (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1997), pp. 152-154.

21. *The Monks of Tibhirine*, p. 52.
22. Poyo conference – Dom Christian's address. See note 30.
23. Poyo conference.
24. *The Monks of Tibhirine*, pp. 46, 112, 135-136.
25. Letter of January 30, 1961 in *The Hidden Ground of Love*, p. 46.
26. Letter of November 7, 1965 in *The Hidden Ground of Love*, p. 61.
27. Letter of December 9, 1964 in *The Hidden Ground of Love*, p. 60.
28. Letter of January 2, 1966 in *The Hidden Ground of Love*, p. 64.
29. Thomas Merton, *The Collected Poems of Thomas Merton* (London: Sheldon Press, 1978), pp. 634-635. The poem was included in the posthumous collection *Sensation Time in the Home*.
30. The English translation is available at: http://www.scourmont.be/chagen/1993/christianeng.htm (accessed February 18, 2020). The document runs to 4200 words, but as an HTML document it is hard to reference quotes explicitly. The original French conference text is included in: Christian de Chergé, *L'invincible espérance*, ed. Bruno Chenu (Paris: Bayard Éditions, 1997).
31. Albert Camus, *The First Man* (London: Penguin Books, 2001), p. 129.
32. Letter of September 26, 1968 in Thomas Merton, *Thomas Merton in Alaska*, ed. Robert E. Daggy (New YorK: New Directions, 1989), p. 51.
33. 'Solitary Life', *The Collected Poems of Thomas Merton*, pp. 808-809.
34. From 'Things in Their identity', chapter 5 of Thomas Merton, *Seeds of Contemplation* (1949).
35. 'The Life that Unifies', *Thomas Merton in Alaska*, p. 146.
36. 'Final Integration', *Merton and Sufism – The Untold Story*, p. 272.
37. 'Monastic Experience and East-West Dialogue', Thomas Merton, *The Asian Journal of Thomas Merton*, ed. Burton, Hart & Laughlin (London: Sheldon Press, 1974), pp. 309-317.
38. Letter of Easter 1965 in *Witness to Freedom: Letters in Times of Crisis*, p. 313.
39. 'God speaks and God is to be heard, not only on Sinai, not only in my own heart, but in the *voice of the stranger.*' From 'A Letter to Pablo Antonio Cuadra Concerning Giants', *The Collected Poems of Thomas Merton*, p. 384.
40. Letter of September 1968, *The Road to Joy*, p. 118.
41. From closing section of Merton's talk in Calcutta. See ref. 37.
42. From Merton's talk in Calcutta. See ref. 37, pp. 312,313.
43. *The Monks of Tibhirine*, p. 246.
44. *The Monks of Tibhirine*, pp. 244-246.
45. From Merton's talk in Calcutta. See ref. 37, p. 313.
46. 'The Unbeliever and Christians' in Albert Camus, *Resistance, Rebellion and Death* (New York: Vintage International, 1995), pp. 73-74.

Stephen Dunhill is a retired teacher living on the Northumbrian coast. Thomas Merton has been his Christian guide for nearly forty years. He has served on the committee of The Thomas Merton Society since 2006, was chair from 2016-20, and is currently editor of The Merton Journal.