

FOCUS SECTION

THOMAS MERTON'S SPIRITUALITY OF EDUCATION

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Thomas Merton was one of the greatest spiritual writers and mentors of our time. This article mines the extensive Merton corpus with a view to education. Three stages are explored in articulating Merton's spirituality of education: 1) understanding what we are; 2) becoming what we are; and 3) realizing our fundamental unity. Merton's letters, books, and lectures are cited, analyzed, and compared in an effort to uncover the stages of Merton's own spiritual journey and to provide a helpful model for today's educational leaders.

In a talk that he gave during a rare trip away from the Abbey of Gethsemani, his Trappist monastery in Kentucky, Thomas Merton remarked, "My dear brothers, we are already one.... What we have to be is what we are" (1975, p. 308). The three parts of this message—understanding what we are, learning to be what we are, and realizing our fundamental unity—aptly frame Merton's spirituality of education.

Merton (1961) understood that our identity is inherent in us, something deeper than what he called the "social" or "illusory" (p. 34) self, something "ultimate and indestructible" (Merton, 1979, p. 5) yet at the same time dynamic, creatively developed, and uniquely expressed in our ordinary selves. To know "what we are" we must come to understand that the source of freedom and meaning in our lives, indeed, life itself, is in the very "ground of [our] own being"—"the hidden ground of love" (Merton, 1985, p. 115).

To say that it is inherent does not mean that our true identity is easily realized. Ironically, we have to *be* what we already *are*. That we must learn to do so suggests something of our own blindness and the need for a certain inner capacity and understanding. In Merton's spirituality of education the

activation and development of our inner capacity to understand and live fully as our real selves is the central concern.

Finally, though deeply personal, the process of inner transformation that leads to self-discovery is simultaneously a process of discovering our deep relatedness to others. "I must look for my identity, somehow, not only in God but in other[s]," Merton (1961, p. 51) writes. To be what we are requires that we realize our oneness, our existence in an original unity intimated in Eastern as well as Western religion (Merton, 1975).

Each of these themes—that our personal identity is embedded dynamically in love in our own being, that discovering ourselves is a process of inner realization that leads us to be what we already are, and that we are most fully ourselves when we live in awareness and response to a hidden relatedness—forms a distinct dimension of Merton's spirituality of education. His spirituality of the person illuminates "what we are." His spirituality of learning and growth suggests what it means to become what we are. His spirituality of relatedness is the basis for understanding what he means when he says, "We are already one."

WHAT WE ARE: MERTON'S SPIRITUALITY OF THE PERSON

As Merton (1979) stated it, "The purpose of education is to show a person how to define himself authentically and spontaneously in relation to his world—not to impose a prefabricated definition of the world, still less an arbitrary definition of the individual himself" (pp. 3-4). We cannot live genuinely and truly free, making the choices that freedom affords, learning what we have to offer to the contemporary world and how to make our personal contribution valid, unless we know "who it is that chooses" (p. 4).

Even as Merton identifies self-discovery as the fundamental purpose of education, however, he wraps the notion of self in irony and paradox. As he put it,

Learning to be oneself means...learning to die in order to live. It means discovering in the ground of one's being a "self" which is ultimate and indestructible, which not only survives the destruction of all other more superficial selves but finds its identity affirmed and clarified by their destruction. (Merton, 1979, p. 5)

To discover oneself means seeking "the very self that finds," not, as we are culturally disposed to think, to find something outside ourselves—some marker of identity—that we can name (Merton, 1979, p. 4). For Merton, the "very self that finds" is the indivisible or whole, albeit "inner" self. The whole self cannot define itself; to do so presumes that it can be both whole

and regard itself as if there is some other perspective outside the whole—a self-contradiction. Our real identity is beyond “essence” and “beyond all ego...and a consciousness that transcends all division, all separation” (Merton, 1979, p. 9). To discover oneself means breaking through to a new consciousness and realization of our own wholeness.

Merton (1981a) expressed this idea much differently in his essay “Day of a Stranger.” More characteristic of his later writing as he sought new ways to communicate to his contemporaries within the Western cultural tradition, and influenced by his study of Eastern religion, he abandoned the philosophical language of self and being for a more indirect and ironic style that suggested what we are as persons by challenging perspective in a way that concepts cannot. He assumed the posture of “stranger” to confound the notion that he could give himself an identity. Thus he wrote,

In an age where there is much talk about “being yourself” I reserve to myself the right to forget about being myself, since in any case there is very little chance of my being anybody else. Rather it seems to me that when one is too intent on “being himself” he runs the risk of impersonating a shadow. (p. 31)

His description of his life as a hermit living in a monastic community also defies the expected response to “What do you do?”—“What I wear is pants. What I do is live. How I pray is breathe” (Merton, 1981a, p. 41). Merton in this instance is not simply confronting social expectation as a declaration of his individuality. He has dissolved the duality of mind and self, or self and image of self in a testimony to his own being. His is a *lived* wholeness. He apprehended his own living wholeness and the importance of safeguarding it in an age habituated to inner division—to a divided consciousness of self. In his journal he wrote simply, “It comes close to being real” (Merton, 1997, p. 169).

Merton confounded cultural expectations similarly in response to a request from an author to say how he had become a “success,” recording that he replied, “If I had a message to my contemporaries...it was surely this: Be anything you like, be madmen, drunks, and bastards of every shape and form, but at all costs avoid one thing: success” (Merton, 1979, p. 11). He concludes, “whatever you do, every act, however small, can teach you everything—provided you see *who* it is that is acting [*italics added*]” (Merton, 1979, p. 14).

In renouncing the underlying cultural presumption of the West that we can create our own ultimate reality, Merton shifts discussion from a social or “prefabricated” and “arbitrary” ground to an inner and existential one. On a certain existential ground, we are defined—or discover ourselves—more “authentically and spontaneously in relation to the world,” not in social terms. Conceptual language cannot communicate adequately what that means.

In terms of the psychological as well as philosophical language that he often used, Merton underscored the difference between what he designated variously as the “external,” “divided,” “social,” “ego,” or “false” self and the “true,” “real” (Del Prete, 1990), “authentic,” “inmost,” (Merton, 1961, 1963, 1968a, 1968d, 1979, 1983) or “whole” (Del Prete, 1990) self. He confronted likewise the stubborn legacy of the modern, Cartesian worldview in Western culture that builds consciousness and meaning on the basis of inner and outer dualities—the dualities of mind and self, and self and world—and that projects an atomized view of the world, with each thing and person not only distinct, but separate and disconnected (Merton, 1968d).

A worldview based on a divided and separate self labors under the illusion that we know ourselves as real from our own individual self-assertions and an affirmation of our own will (Del Prete, 1990; Merton, 1968a). We end up seeking who we are outside ourselves in the visible imprints of our thoughts and actions, in the image that we think others want to see, or, drawn by the gravitational pull of commercial culture, in the false sense of reality gained in the pursuit of things as an end in itself. We seek ourselves as an object, a search that is “futile and self-contradictory” (Merton, 1979, p. 4). We lose contact with the integrity of our own inner depths (Merton, 1975). In Merton’s (1979) words,

Modern man believes he is fruitful and productive when his ego is aggressively affirmed, when he is visibly active, and when his action produces obvious results.... Only when our activity proceeds out of the ground in which we have consented to be dissolved does it have the divine fruitfulness of love and grace...does it really reach others in true communion. (p. 23)

A postmodern reaction against the modernist or Cartesian worldview might suggest that our identities are constructed in relation to social and cultural environments, or co-constructed rather than individually determined. “Identity” in this sense is highly contextualized, as well as fluid and situational. It can have a profound impact on our lives, giving us a sense of place and meaning, for better or worse, in relation to others. Merton would not disagree with this conceptualization of how a sense of identity is formed and reformed. What he would say, however, is that any identity constructed by us or by our social environment, or both, is not our most fundamental and true identity, but a provisional one that makes it more or less possible for us to find ourselves on a deeper level and identify ourselves authentically and spontaneously in relation to the world.

To add a twist of complexity to its paradoxical nature, Merton makes clear that while self-discovery should be the fundamental purpose of education, we cannot discover ourselves wholly on our own. As ultimately the “spark” of “the Absolute recognizing itself in me” (Merton, 1979, p. 10), our

true selves are animated uniquely in each of us through God present in love directly and personally in our own being (Merton, 1961). In the nonmetaphysical and nontheological language that he often used, particularly in comparative religious discussion, we “find” ourselves when the reality of the love that grounds our existence is realized within us. And what we find is as mysterious as it is utterly transforming; in our ordinary, everyday selves, as he said in one celebrated passage, we “are all walking around shining like the sun” (Merton, 1965c, p. 157).

The dissolution of ego and all false identity in the ground of being and of love is the inner transformation that animates our ordinary lives in love. We wear pants, we live, we breathe; we live our wholeness. In its Christian dimension, as Merton emphasized, this transformation is fulfilled when we can say with St. Paul, “I live, now not I, but Christ lives in me” (Galatians 2:20). Lived wholeness ultimately becomes lived theology—a living experience of Christian truth—in Merton’s spirituality of the person (Merton, 1971).

During one of the weekly conferences that he gave at Gethsemani Abbey, Merton linked Christ with our real identity in an extraordinarily concrete and personal way. His ostensible topic was William Faulkner’s “The Bear,” but in his introduction he momentarily diverted to a concentrated reflection on becoming yourself (Del Prete, 1999; Merton, 1967). Note that in referring to “Louie” in the passage transcribed below, Merton used the religious name by which he was known in the monastic community to refer to himself.

There’s only one thing for anybody to become in life—there’s no point in becoming spiritual, a waste of time...you’ve come here [to the monastery]...to become yourself, to discover your complete identity, to be you...not something else other than you. The “catch” to that of course is that our full identity as monks and as Christians is Christ, but it is Christ in each one of us, see, and the idea is...I have to become me in such a way that I am the Christ who can only be Christ in me. There is a “Louie-Christ” which has to be brought into existence and hasn’t matured yet...Not just an abstract Christ but the Christ who can only be what he wants to be in us and he can’t be in me what he is in anybody else. See, there is a unique realization of Christ which He wants to find in me and in each one of us. (Merton, 1967)

Merton’s personalization of the meaning of self-discovery as the realization of Christ uniquely in each of us stands in radical contrast to the prevailing cultural tendency to make of ourselves a project or the fulfillment of an image, whether spiritual or otherwise (Merton, 1965d). To become what we are as persons is not only to become our ordinary, whole, real, naked, inmost self, but also and at once our unique “Christ-self” grounded in a hidden wholeness and hidden love, absolute, infinitely enlivening and creative, and all-encompassing.

BECOMING WHAT WE ARE: MERTON'S SPIRITUALITY OF LEARNING

Merton writes that our learning must "dispose" us to the discovery of ourselves on the deepest possible level, and that the various disciplines of study should "provide ways or paths" for developing our capacity to ignite the spark that is "the flash of the Absolute recognizing itself in me" (Merton, 1979, p. 10). How does Merton suggest that we educate so as to activate our capacity to be what we are? Putting aside the question of particular monastic or spiritual practices such as daily prayer and manual work so as to make discussion pertinent to formal education in as broad a sense as possible, the answer is most evident in his spirituality of learning and in his teaching.

SEEKING THE TRUTH

As the end of education, true personal identity cannot be achieved without the development of some sense of freedom and the ability to make choices from real possibilities, therefore the capacity to judge and think (Merton, 1979, 1994). What this implies in turn is not the absence of critical thinking and genuine thought, but the determined application of it in a process of discerning what is real and true, and a curriculum that will foster that process meaningfully, particularly as a safeguard against the insidious influence of various forms of propaganda. Merton was grateful for his tutelage under teachers such as Mark Van Doren from Columbia University precisely because they, along with books that he read and personal contacts that he had, cultivated his sense of what was significant and how to determine it (Del Prete, 1990; Merton, 1948).

The lasting impact of Merton's teaching mentors is evident in his own advice to others as well as his sense of purpose as a teacher. Responding to a college bookstore manager who asked him about the importance of reading in college, he wrote,

I might mention...that the quality of the books one reads and of the thoughts one "buys" certainly does make a difference. The mere fact that an idea is new and exciting does not necessarily make it true. Truth is important and the whole purpose of thinking is to be able to tell the difference between what is true and what only looks good. (Merton, 1994, p. 169)

Reflecting on his vocation in his journal, he mused,

I am a writer, a student and a teacher as well as a contemplative of sorts.... And the great thing in my life is, or should be, love of truth. I know there is nothing more precious than the bond of charity created by communicating and sharing the truth. This is really my whole life. (Merton, 1996b, p. 264)

“Truth” for Merton has several levels of meaning, each an aspect of “the ultimate, hidden and definitive truth which is believed rather than known,” and each having a distinct epistemological dimension (Merton, 1971, p. 190). The “incarnate” truth is the truth of what we are as persons (Merton, 1980a, p. 211). Thus Merton (1965c) wrote, “Life is, or should be, nothing but a struggle to seek truth: yet what we seek is really the truth that we already possess” (p. 184). The living truth that we embody, involving our whole, undivided selves, is known only through love (Merton, 1985). The counterpart to this embodied truth in the natural world is the knowledge of things as they are. To know things fully, as they are, we must know them whole, in their totality. In contrast, the “experimental” (Merton, 1971, p. 203) approach to learning in science yields only a “provisional” (p. 190) truth. The larger “definitive” (p. 190) truth, the reality of God at the center of our being, is the ground of all of the other dimensions of truth.

The search for our inner truth—our true selves—“involves not only dialectic, but a long labor of acceptance, obedience, liberty and love” (Merton, 1965c, p. 184). The dialectic between opening to and experiencing our deepest reality, which is our true source of freedom, on the one hand, and letting go of self or socially constructed sources of identity, on the other, is a key process of growth in Merton’s spirituality of education.

AN INTUITIVE AND INTERIOR WAY OF KNOWING

To activate and grow in our capacity to know the living dimensions of truth requires practice in an intuitive way of knowing that Merton views as natural, though neglected in Western society, as he explains in one of the weekly conferences that he taught as Master of Novices for 10 years (Merton, 1988a). He begins by making an important distinction between the roles of reason and experience in arriving at “the natural knowledge of God,” emphasizing that reason alone is not sufficient. One must first develop an awareness and experience of being. As he explains it, we have to become aware of our own existence, “to the fact that ‘I am.’” Furthermore, we have to recognize in the experience of our own being—our own “isness”—the reality of all being. In Merton’s (1988a) words,

There is this intuition of being, not only a sense of one’s own existence but a sense that everything exists.... The whole thing is...this very strong experience of “isness”.... If you deepen that...all that is, so to speak, becomes completely transparent...and you see...beyond all this being is Infinite Being. And very simply one sees that this Infinite Being is our Father, a person. This kind of realization...should be part of everybody’s normal equipment.

In his commentary to the novice monks, it is clear that Merton viewed an awareness of being, or ontological awareness, as much different from self-awareness. The intuition of being is not a self-reflexive act, and should not be confused with "the subjective experience of the individual self" (Merton, 1968d, p. 23). To become aware of the reality of our own being, we must transcend, in an intuition of "Being," the consciousness of self as independent subject or object (Merton, 1968d). In nonmetaphysical language, we must intuit our inmost being in the hidden and infinite ground of love (Merton, 1968d).

Merton (1965c) emphasized the full scope of what it means to intuit our own being incisively in a passage from his journal that he prepared for publication:

All being is from God.

This is not simply an arbitrary and tendentious "religious" affirmation...[it] implies the deepest respect for reality and for the being of everything that is...[The] *direct intuition of the act of being*...is an act of contemplation and philosophical wisdom rather than the fruit of scientific analysis....Such an intuition is simply an immediate grasp of one's own inexplicable personal reality in one's own incommunicable act of existing!

One who has experienced the baffling, humbling, and liberating clarity of this immediate sense of what it means to *be* has in that very act experienced something of the presence of God. For God is present to me in the act of my own being....(pp. 220-221)

Shifting to a more prophetic voice, he added, "The real root-sin of modern man is that, in ignoring and contemning being, and especially his own *being*, he has made his *existence* a disease and affliction" (Merton, 1965c, p. 221).

In emphasizing the importance of an intuitive way of knowing as the inner path to an awareness and experience of being, Merton is hardly setting up reason as a dangerous foil. As he noted in his conference with the novices, reason, oriented accordingly, can and should support intellectual formation dedicated to discerning what is real and true. An intuitive way of knowing, however, leads to another realm—a realm of inner experience—that is beyond the conceptual and analytical and beyond even concepts such as true self and false self, and that reason, as much as it should try, can at best only allude to. Whereas a Western analytical mode—the modes of Aristotelian or scholastic philosophy, for instance—presumes a distance or capacity to stand apart from what is being considered, to intuit being means to apprehend with one's whole self in a direct, experiential, concrete way (Merton, 1968d). An intuitive awareness of being bridges the divide between self and mind, or self and reality, fostered by Western dualistic thinking; one enters into the realm of holistic experience, living truth, and wisdom.

Ontological awareness and inner experience are central themes in Merton's spirituality of education. If, as Merton insisted, education must dispose us to self-discovery, to the possibility of inner transformation in love, then it must help foster an inner openness, openness first of all to an experience of our own being and the integrity of our inner depths. For Merton that possibility is inherently real—"part of everybody's normal equipment." At the same time he sees much in our culture to confound the effort.

INTERIOR KNOWING, BEING, AND OUR CULTURAL SELVES

To develop an awareness of being requires a certain degree of openness beyond identity in a social and cultural sense, which in turn implies more than a superficial understanding of how these dimensions of our lives are formed (Merton, 1968b). As Merton (1971) has written in "The Need for a New Education," an essay that addresses monastic practice but is rich with insight having broader significance,

Monks are intent on exploring the inner meaning of the Mystery of Christ in the world of our time and this requires some understanding of the world and of themselves as modern people, as well as a realization of and witness to the presence of Christ in the world. (p. 198)

Merton tried in various ways through the monastic curriculum to stimulate deep cultural understanding and a dynamic interplay between inner experience (as an experience of being) and culturally constructed modes of thinking and making meaning. In a pattern that became typical toward the end of his decade as Master of Novices in 1965, and afterwards when he gave weekly talks in his community, he drew from his own ever-widening studies to present new perspectives on themes pertinent to the formation of monks as whole persons, yet at first blush far removed from the traditional Trappist monastic curriculum, which focused on Biblical, monastic, and Christian spiritual study (Del Prete, 1996). To take one example as representative, as the topic for one of his last conferences as Master of Novices, Merton chose to discuss Bantu philosophy. The Bantu are located in central Africa, in what is now Zaire. The "primitive" Bantu view of the world was relevant precisely because it raised important questions about the presumptions underlying the modern Western worldview. As he explains in introducing the topic, "I am very interested in this whole question of primitive kinds of philosophy, and primitive outlook on life and being...it's closer to the Bible, for example, than some of the stuff that we have with our post-Cartesian viewpoint" (Merton, 1965a).

Merton contrasted the Western cultural habit of standing back, of analyzing, judging, and categorizing from a distance with the more direct, immedi-

ate, and concrete Bantu apprehension of reality. Whereas the Western view of the relationship of self and world presumes the person is set over and against everything else, in a subject-object relationship, the Bantu are "right in the middle of everything." The deeply ingrained Western way of thinking is manifested in language constructions that presume an ability to separate out and make a judgment about what is (Merton uses "This is a quail" as an example). In contrast, the Bantu see themselves as one living force among many. They live with a sense of the world that might be described as intersubjective, in which they see themselves as a living force seeking a kind of right relationship with other living forces. Their experience of these forces is very concrete (e.g., one's mother and father, whether alive or dead, are a permanent living force). Perceiving themselves as acted upon by other beings as well as acting, they do not exercise judgment with regard to what something is, but instead experience and live in acceptance and response to its active presence. Merton suggests that this way of knowing and experiencing the world has a biblical analogy, as in Genesis when the well Abraham is digging is "the well of the seeing," Abraham in some very concrete sense being "under the eyes of God." It would be quite different if one were to say, "God is present," and even more abstract to refer to "the Presence of God."

For Merton, the Bantu way of knowing is intuitive, originating in a sense of interiority dulled in Western culture and resulting in an "intuitive contact with reality" outside the realm of general Western experience. As he emphasized,

A very deep sense of interiority...is natural to man, and it's natural to primitive man, and it's natural to people in less civilized cultures than ours, because people in these simple primitive cultures are naturally interior. Our society is such that it has been systematically destroyed by the different modes we have for keeping people outside themselves all the time...the greatest problem, psychologically speaking, of our society is that people are prevented from getting inside.... (Merton, 1965a)

He put it somewhat differently in another context during a taped conversation: "One of the reasons why [our society] is sick is that it's completely from the top of the head. It's completely cerebral. It has utterly neglected everything to do with the rest of the human being; the whole person is reduced to a very small part of who and what the person is" (Merton, 1991, p. 48). This is not to say that Merton undervalued the Western mode of thinking—"The fact that we are able to abstract and analyze...and work things out intellectually has made us free to do all sorts of things with our knowledge" (Merton, 1965a). But he made clear that understanding the limitations of our own deeply ingrained cultural ways of seeing and experiencing the world is necessary if we are to open inner paths to understanding what we are.

Merton used alternative cultural perspectives such as Bantu philosophy as pedagogical tools not only to engender deep cultural understanding, but also to foster a way of knowing grounded in experience and intuition. He reminded the novices in his talk on the Bantu that it is our manner of knowing that determines whether we come to experience "what it means to be called by God and what it means to dwell in a place where God speaks to everybody" (Merton, 1965a).

INTEGRATING INTELLECT, STUDY, AND SPIRITUAL LIFE

If in Merton's spirituality of learning there is an intimate relationship between who we are and how we know, between self-discovery and inner experience, what then is the role of intellect and study? How, in addition, are we to regard the natural as well as human worlds as subjects for study?

It is helpful to understand how traditional monastic learning was framed in order to understand how intellect and the life of the mind are integrated with intuition and experience in Merton's spirituality of learning. As Merton (1980b) interpreted St. Bernard of Clairvaux, founder of his Cistercian monastic order in the 12th century, "we study in order to love" (p. 127). In the context of traditional monastic life, "study" was virtually synonymous with reading the Bible and the Fathers of the Church. The manner and purpose of monastic study differed from scholastic approaches, which emphasized the development of knowledge through the application of a rigorous and impersonal method of investigating a text or issue, with a protocol of posing and solving problems. Monastic education was not first and foremost focused on attaining insight in this speculative and deductive manner; it was more personalistic, concerned not with intellectual understanding ("*scientia*") (Leclercq, 1961, p. 12) so much as experience, not with abstract truth so much as a concrete experience of living truth and wisdom ("*sapientia*") (Leclercq, 1961, p. 16).

Thus in monastic culture the practice known as *lectio divina* developed, during which one reads not simply to be able to say what has been written, but to comprehend the truth on a deep level; that is, to break through to spiritual awareness—to "enter into the wisdom and knowledge of God" (Merton, 1955?). Merton phrased it simply in a letter addressing the importance of book reading, "Traditionally, for a monk, reading is inseparable from *meditation*" (Merton, 1994, p. 165). *Lectio divina* leads beyond the "surface of things" to an assimilation of God's word, and a meditation on life and the meaning of our own lives; it leads finally to contemplative prayer (Merton, 1960?). Monastic learning is meant always to be deeply personal, always potentially integrating and transformative, always pointing to the discovery of the "true self" as a matter of inner experience and love.

It is natural to ask whether the traditional orientation of monastic learning to inner experience and its emphasis on more meditative and intuitive modes of knowing is anti-intellectual. Certainly the question of what role the mind plays in monastic study concerned Merton as a young monk and novice monastic teacher. He wrote to Cistercian scholar Jean Leclercq of his interest in understanding St. Bernard's attitude toward learning, clearly seeking affirmation for his view that the pursuit of knowledge and the desire for wisdom were conjoined in Bernard, as a form of assurance that his own intellectual efforts aligned with Cistercian spiritual tradition (Merton, 1990). As he clearly came to see, what is critical is a matter of means and ends, of how we use our minds and to what purpose (Merton, 1979). The message he gave to his students in a monastic orientation guide is simple: "Our studies should mean something in our own lives." He oriented a young student similarly in a letter: "Do not study merely to pass exams or to please your teachers, but to find truth and to awaken deeper levels of life in yourself" (Merton, 1989b, p. 335).

St. Bernard in his time, like Merton in his, had a keen awareness of how easy it is to subvert the personalistic end of education. Bernard commented directly on the potential for speculative and abstract knowing, fueled by pride, to become an end in itself—"Science puffeth up" (as cited in Merton, 1980b, p. 126). We need only to reflect on the haunting record of desensitized doctors working for Nazi purposes in World War II or on those swept up unthinkingly in the allure of power in the continued development of the technology of nuclear destruction to see the contemporary relevance of St. Bernard's insight (Lifton & Markusen, 1990). So that intellect would be harnessed to wisdom rather than pride, Bernard counseled simplicity in intellectual work and learning to shed "all that is superfluous, unnecessary, indirect" in coming to know and love God (Merton, 1980b, p. 126).

In his effort to promote a manner of knowing that deepens inner experience and disposes us to become what we are, Merton was a monastic learner and teacher formed in the mold of St. Bernard. This connection is strikingly palpable in one instance of his teaching in which St. Bernard's work itself is the subject. Merton began by assuring the novices that his intent was not to give a review of Bernard's work—that would be "like school" (Merton, 1988b). Nor is the point simply to decode the meaning of the words of the tenth-century Cistercian founder. He asked his students instead to attend not so much to the words as to their "implications," and to listen in their implications for the "resonances" and "echoes" of genuine inner experience. His pedagogy in this instance revealed his belief that language need not be viewed simply as a medium that encodes cultural meaning; it can also be a medium for expressing, or at least pointing to, lived inner experience. Bernard reflected the kind of qualitative experience of reality that is both personal and universal, and that is vitally real and *present* across time. The key

to unlocking the door to understanding that experience is to "transpose it into our time and our way of looking at things" (Merton, 1988b). This process of transposition is a central feature of Merton's spirituality of learning and his pedagogy.

To know in the manner that Merton endeavored to foster in his conference on Bernard is both an intellectual and intuitive act. The process of transposition requires an understanding of words as well as an intuitive grasp of their source and meaning in experience. Merton was concerned with developing a personal openness to a qualitative perception of reality, not simply knowing about and explaining in conceptual terms what someone else has experienced.

Merton's treatment of Bernard reflects the importance he places more generally on differentiating between knowledge that opens the possibility for inner experience and ideas divorced from experience. In his teaching he was intent on opening his students to the echoes and resonances of truth in deep personal experience using resources from the contemplative spiritual tradition such as Bernard's work (Merton, 1971). He advises more generally that we learn from books through a certain manner of knowing only when they bring us into "contact with great persons, with [persons] who had more than their own share of humanity...who were persons for the whole world and not for themselves alone" (Merton, 1956, p. 63).

For Merton (1956), "Ideas and words are not the food of the intelligence, but truth. And not an abstract truth that feeds the mind alone...[but] something that can be embraced and loved..." (p. 63). In keeping with monastic tradition, one must aspire in study to move from intellectual understanding to "sapiential" understanding—"a kind of understanding rooted in love" (Merton, 1971, p. 201). For Merton (1971) "loving knowledge" is a "contemplative knowledge, a fruit of a living and realizing faith" (p. 161). Karl Rahner (1984), for whom love is the "full flower of knowledge," is illuminating in this regard: "Only the experience of knowledge's blooming into love has any power to work a transformation in me, in my very self" (p. 29).

Merton evoked and enlarged a tradition of learning that sought to unite knowledge with wisdom, love, and inner transformation. It was imperative for him as a learner and teacher not only to become attentive to the echoes and resonances of deep human experience and integrity, of living truth, but also to make them transparent and available to the present as seeds for the development of loving knowledge. In this way he strove to make study serve the purpose of awakening deeper levels of life, an integrative, personalistic, and "life-giving" approach essential for the formation of the whole person (Merton, 1962).