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The Madonna of the Book is a small painting by the Italian Renaissance artist Sandro Botticelli, 1480 and 1483.

Editor

Edward O'Donnell, OCD
EdODonnell@aol.com

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By Patrick O'Connell, PhD

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AS I WAS LISTENING to the healthcare workers in the hospital waiting room speak of the difficulties and struggles they encounter every day as they minister to the sick and dying, I realized that this year's retreat in Assisi, Italy, was providing others with both a place to share their burden of caring for the sick and a time for renewal. Because of the pressures that are involved with "bearing one another's burdens," healthcare workers and all of us who care for others in need can become weary and tired and in the process lose sight of what we are about as we try to help others with their difficulties.

We term our retreat *Art of Presence* because it attempts to assist these men and women, in their ministry of caring, to be present to themselves, to their patients, and to the God who is always with them. When we become overburdened with the needs and cares of others, we can very easily distance ourselves from those whom we care for and even from ourselves. Some time apart, with others or alone, is needed to recuperate and find strength to continue the ministry of caring. If this self-care is not present, caring for others will become too burdensome to continue. The term "burnout" is often used to describe the stage someone arrives at when caring for others is no longer an option because of one's own personal need for care. We can become just too tired and worn out to continue to give to others.

The challenge facing all of us—and especially healthcare workers and other caretakers—is to honor

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the saying of St. Paul to “bear one another’s burdens” (Gal 6:2), while at the same time caring for ourselves.

During the retreat in Assisi, it became clear to many there that they needed to care for themselves more—to take time for prayer and relaxation. But even though these insights were very clear during the retreat, everyone realized that they would be hard to bring into everyday life when they returned home. The quandary was to find a way to integrate caring for others and caring for ourselves into a dynamic reality, so that our lives are “whole,” not fragmented and divided.

When I look for a mentor or mentors for living this style of integrated life, I first call upon the saints to guide me. These men and women, who lived busy and challenging lives, were always at rest in the center of their being, always at rest in God. They attempted to imitate St. Augustine’s description of God as *Semper agens, Semper quietus*, “Always active, always at rest” (*Conf. 1.4.4*).

Can we imitate the God who created us and gives us life, the God who sustains us and gives us the strength to serve others—to “bear one another’s burdens”? I believe we can do this if we remain present to our loving God:

Remain in me, as I remain in you. Just as a branch cannot bear fruit on its own unless it remains on the vine, so neither can you unless you remain in me. I am the vine, you are the branches. Whoever remains in me and I in him will bear much fruit, because without me you can do nothing. (Jn 15:4–5)

Edward O'Donnell

Prayers of St. Teresa of Jesus (Avila)

The following series of prayers by St. Teresa of Avila helps us to understand the mind and heart of Teresa. Her love for God was total, and she gave herself completely to God's love.

* * * * *

Give me the grace to recollect myself in the little heaven of my soul where You have established Your dwelling. There You let me find You, there I feel that You are closer to me than anywhere else, and there You prepare my soul quickly to enter into intimacy with You.... Help me O Lord, to withdraw my senses from exterior things, make them docile to the commands of my will, so that when I want to converse with You, they will retire at once, like bees shutting themselves up in the hive in order to make honey.

* * * * *

O Lord of heaven and earth! Is it possible, while we are still in this mortal life, for us to enjoy You with such special friendship? Oh! The joys which You bestow on souls who give themselves entirely to You! ...For the love of the Lord, my soul, wake out of this sleep and remember that God does not keep you waiting until the next life before rewarding you for your love of Him. Your recompense begins in this life.

* * * * *

Prayers of St. Teresa of Avila

They that really love You, my Good, walk safely on a broad and royal road. They are far from the precipice. Hardly have they begun to stumble when You, Lord, give them Your hand. One fall is not sufficient for a person to be lost nor are many, if they love You and not the things of the world. They journey in the valley of humility. I cannot understand what it is that makes people afraid of setting out on the road of perfection. May the Lord, because of who He is, give us understanding of how wretched is the security that lies in such manifest dangers as following the crowd and how true security lies in striving to make progress on the road of God. Let them turn their eyes to Him and not fear the setting of this Sun of Justice, nor, if we don't first abandon Him, will He allow us to walk at night and go astray.

* * * * *

O Lord, who could describe how great a gain it is to cast ourselves into Your arms and make an agreement with You; You take care of my affairs and I of Yours.... For what am I Lord without You? ...What more do I want in this life than to be so near you that there is no division between You and me. O Lord of my life, draw me to Yourself, but do it in such a way that my will may ever remain so united to You that it shall be unable to leave You.

* * * * *

O Lord, how true that all harm comes to us from not keeping our eyes fixed on You; if we were to look at

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nothing else but the way, we would soon arrive. But we meet with a thousand falls and obstacles and lose the way because we don't keep our eyes—as I say—on the true way. It seems so new to us that you would think we had never walked on it. It's certainly something to excite pity, that which sometimes happens.

* * * * *

Teach me, my God, to suffer in peace the afflictions which You send me that my soul may emerge from the crucible like gold, both brighter and purer, to find You within me.

* * * * *

My God, I want nothing but Your will, submission to it has such power over me that my soul desires neither death nor life. But then, if it be Your will, I desire to live, in order to serve You better. If, through my intercession, I could do anything to make a single soul love and praise You more, and that only for a short time, it would seem to me of greater moment than my being in glory.

* * * * *

...Grant, that our love may never be small, but always most ardent, like a great fire that cannot but shine brightly.

* * * * *

No, my God, love does not consist in shedding tears, in enjoying consolations and that tenderness which for the most part we desire and in which we find comfort,

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but in serving You with righteousness, fortitude of soul, and humility. The other seems to me to be receiving rather than giving anything...

* * * * *

O Lord, grant that my love be not the fruit of my imagination but be proved by works. What can I do for You who died for us and created us and gave us being, without counting myself fortunate in being able to repay You something of what I owe you? Well do I know, my Lord, of how little I am capable. But I shall be able to do all things provided You do not withdraw from me.

* * * * *

O my soul: Consider the great delight and great love the Father has in knowing His Son and the Son in knowing His Father; and the enkindling love with which the Holy Spirit is joined with them; and how no one of them is able to be separate from this love and knowledge, because they are one. These sovereign Persons know each other, love each other, and delight in each other. Well, what need is there for my love? Why do You want it, my God, or what do You gain? Oh, may You be blessed! May You be blessed, my God, forever! May all things praise You, Lord, without end, since in You there can be no end.

* * * * *

Be joyful, my soul, for there is someone who loves your God as He deserves. Be joyful, for there is someone who knows His goodness and value. Give thanks to Him, for He has given us on earth someone who thus

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knows Him, as His only Son. Under this protection you can approach and petition Him, for then His Majesty takes delight in you. Don't let any earthly thing be enough to separate you from your delight, and rejoice in the grandeur of God; in how He deserves to be loved and praised; that He helps you to play some small role in the blessing of His name; and that you can truthfully say: My soul magnifies and praises the Lord.

* * * * *

**These prayers are assembled by the Discalced Carmelite
Nuns of Boston, Mass., and appear on their website:**

<http://carmelitesofboston.org>



Patrick O'Connell, PhD

The Traditional Sources of Thomas Merton's Environmental Spirituality

Part One

STUDIES OF THOMAS MERTON'S social thought have focused on his growing awareness during the final years of his life of the need for environmental responsibility,¹ particularly after reading Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* in 1963 and Roderick Nash's *Wilderness and the American Mind* in the last year of his life. In his 1968 review of Nash's book, Merton stressed the importance of the environmental ethic of pioneer ecologist Aldo Leopold as a guiding principle for the present and future. A distorted concept of freedom that in practice has led to ruthless exploitation of the environment by industrial and military institutions has reached the point, Merton believed, of threatening the foundations of life on earth:

Leopold brought into clear focus one of the most important moral discoveries of our time. This can be called the ecological conscience, which is centered in an awareness of man's true place as a dependent member of the biotic community.²

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The utilitarian and pragmatic attitude that sees the natural world principally as a potential source of profit must be countered by an ecological awareness if the process of environmental degradation is to be reversed.

In a February 1968 letter to Barbara Hubbard, Merton stresses the need to “retain a solid ecological consciousness”³ rather than to become seduced by what he calls a “millennial consciousness,” oriented completely toward a vision of a utopian future brought about by technological mastery, which tends in actuality to

destroy and repudiate the past...by immolating our living earth, by careless and stupid exploitation for short-term commercial, military, or technological ends, which will be paid for by irreparable loss in living species and natural resources. (WF 74)

While the sense of urgency was new, Merton's recognition that a commitment to cherish and protect the environment is an integral dimension of the Christian life was rooted in his deep appreciation of the sacramentality of the natural world, of creation as a sign of the Creator, that was already developing at the time of his conversion in 1938 and continued to deepen as he immersed himself in the resources of the Christian theological and spiritual tradition throughout the course of his monastic life.

First Insights

The first significant discussion of the natural world in Merton's published work appears in the second chapter

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of his 1949 book of meditations, *Seeds of Contemplation*, entitled "Things in Their Identity," in which he writes that each created being is a finite manifestation of the infinite Creator:

A tree gives glory to God first of all by being a tree. For in being what God means it to be, it is imitating an idea which is in God and which is not distinct from the essence of God, and therefore a tree imitates God by being a tree. The more it is like itself, the more it is like Him.⁴

Merton goes on to emphasize that this does not mean that a particular object is to be understood simply as an imperfect material reproduction of an eternal archetype in the mind of God. It is not by conforming more or less exactly to a generic model that a being realizes its authentic identity, but by embodying its own unique, unrepeatable individuality given by God to it alone: "This particular tree will give glory to God by spreading out its roots in the earth and raising its branches into the air and the light in a way that no other tree before or after it ever did or will do" (SC 24). Precisely because God is infinite, there are an infinite number of ways of reflecting God, so that each created being does so in its own specific manner. Merton continues:

Therefore each particular being, in its individuality, its concrete nature and entity, with all its own characteristics and its private qualities and its own inviolable identity, gives glory to God by being precisely what He wants it to be here and now, in the circumstances ordained for it by His Love and His infinite Art. The forms and individual characters of living and growing things and of inanimate things and of animals and flowers and all

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nature, constitute their holiness in the sight of God. Their inscape is their sanctity. (SC 25)

The reference to “inscape” here makes clear that in this recognition of the holiness of every creature, Merton is drawing on the insights of the Jesuit poet Gerard Manley Hopkins.

Gerard Manley Hopkins

Merton made his first acquaintance with the poetry of Hopkins while in prep school at Oakham in England,⁵ but it was in the autumn of 1938, as he was being drawn more and more toward the Catholic Church, that he became fascinated with Hopkins' notebooks, as well as deeply impressed with his verse (SSM 211). It was while reading about Hopkins' conversion in G. F. Lahey's biography⁶ that Merton felt himself impelled to walk from his apartment near Columbia University to Corpus Christi Church and to tell Fr. Ford, the pastor, that he himself wished to become a Catholic (SSM 215).⁷ So impressed was Merton with Hopkins that he had hoped to write his doctoral dissertation on his work (SSM 235).⁸

Inscape was a term invented by Hopkins to describe the inner form of coherence and beauty in particular things. It occurs almost fifty times in Hopkins' journal for the years 1868–1875,⁹ in a variety of ways, most often “to indicate the essential individuality and particularity or ‘selfhood’ of a thing working itself out and expressing itself in design and pattern.”¹⁰ For example, on June 13, 1871, Hopkins notes:

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A beautiful instance of inscape...is seen in the behaviour of the flag flower from the shut bud to the full blowing: each term you can distinguish is beautiful in itself and of course if the whole "behaviour" were gathered up and so stilled it would have a beauty of all the higher degree.¹¹

Hopkins even discovers inscape "in the random clods and broken heaps of snow made by the cast of a broom," commenting, "All the world is full of inscape and chance left free to act falls into an order as well as purpose" (Hopkins 128 [February 24, 1873]).¹² Merton himself will later define inscape as

the inner structure of a living, or organic, or even inorganic created being, the result of its gradual development under the secret action of nature—and the creative hand of God—the trademark of God imprinted in the individual structure given to a thing by its history—the mark of God's love and God's wisdom imprinted in the unique identity of a thing.¹³

In *Seeds of Contemplation*, Merton goes on to exemplify just what inscape entails through additional precise descriptions of specific creatures:

The special clumsy beauty of this particular colt on this April day in this field under these clouds is a holiness consecrated to God by His own Art, and it declares the glory of God. The pale flowers of the dogwood outside this window are saints. The little yellow flowers that nobody notices on the edge of that road are saints looking up into the face of God. This leaf has its own texture and its own pattern of veins and its own holy shape, and the bass and trout hiding in the deep pools of the river are canonized by their beauty and their strength. (SC 25)

Ultimately, these natural objects serve as models for human beings, likewise called to holiness by freely

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choosing to be who they truly are, to realize their own authentic identity as images of God. This sensitivity to the beauty of natural objects as signs of the divine presence in creation, an intuition of the “sacred and marvelous” present in the ordinary,¹⁴ continues to mark Merton's response to the world around him throughout the remaining two decades of his life.¹⁵

Franciscan Influence

The perception of inscape even relates, albeit somewhat indirectly, to Merton's early interest in Franciscan theology and spirituality, which initially drew him toward entering the Order of Friars Minor.¹⁶ The very first mention of St. Francis in Merton's journal refers to his sermon to the birds (RM 24), and the Franciscan sense of kinship with all creation is evident in Merton's own early poetry, as for example in the lovely early lyric “Evening,” in which the young children love “The trees, their innocent sisters” (l. 13),¹⁷ or in the reference to “the hay-colored sun, our marvelous cousin” (l. 9) in “Aubade: Lake Erie” (TP [7]; CP 35). While teaching at St. Bonaventure College, Merton engaged in a careful study of the *Itinerarium Mentis in Deum* of the great Franciscan theologian after whom the school was named and copied into his journal the passage from the first chapter in which Bonaventure presents an overview of the spiritual journey to God, which begins with recognizing the “*vestigia Dei*,” the traces or “footprints” of God, in the created world (RM 270 [12/4/40]). When he was debating with himself

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about entering the Cistercians, he questioned whether he would be somehow cut off from the natural world:

Telling myself some absurd thing about the necessity to love God's creatures—nature, etc. The only answer to that is: there is nothing in the Trappist discipline to prevent you loving nature the way I meant it then and do now: loving it in God's creation, and a sign of His goodness and Love. (*RM* 399)

Much later he would recall saying at the time, "I'm a Franciscan, I need nature" at the precise spot that he would pass coming down from the hermitage decades later, commenting, "God was telling me something. I have more nature here than I would have had anywhere."¹⁸

But for close to a decade, Merton's strongest Franciscan enthusiasm was for the late thirteenth-century theologian John Duns Scotus, whom he first encountered at Columbia in a course with Daniel Walsh in the Fall of 1938 as he was preparing for baptism (*SSM* 219),¹⁹ and later studied at St. Bonaventure with Fr. Philotheus Boehner (*SSM* 333, 337). The original version of *The Seven Storey Mountain* had numerous references to Scotus (see Mott 231–232), and he appears frequently in the journal of Merton's early monastic years.²⁰ In an August 17, 1946, letter to his publisher James Laughlin, Merton confides his desire to write "a book, some 150 pages long, on Scotus," needed because "there is practically nothing about him available, especially in English."²¹ Eventually Merton found Scotus too complicated and gave up the idea of a book,

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noting when he started teaching the scholastics at Gethsemani that “our life is not designed for theological controversy and Scotus is more than the Cistercian head can bear—at least until somebody distills his essence

The Incarnation of the Word was not simply a consequence of the fall but the culminating point of creation

and gives it to us second-hand” (*ES* 459 [6/13/51]).

That somebody was not to be himself, yet Scotus had a formative influence on Merton's spirituality.

The key Christological idea of Scotus that the Incarnation of the Word was not simply a consequence of the fall but the culminating point of creation is evident throughout Merton's work, from his reference in the 1949 poem “Dry Places” to “Christ...promised first without scars” (1.35)²² to the second paragraph of the final chapter of *New Seeds of Contemplation*, in which he writes, “The Lord made the world and made man in order that He Himself might descend into the world, that He Himself might become Man” (NSC 290), a deeply positive perception of the ultimate purpose of creation.

As Merton was surely aware, Hopkins' enthusiasm for Scotus was at least equal to his own and was due in large part to the Franciscan's concept of “*haecceitas*,” the unique individual form or “thisness” present in every created being—in which the Jesuit poet found confirmation and philosophical justification for his own intuition of inscape.²³ In August 1872, Hopkins wrote that “when I took in any inscape of the sky or

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sea I thought of Scotus" (Hopkins 126), and, in his sonnet "Duns Scotus's Oxford," he would call the great Franciscan the one "who of all men most sways my spirits to peace" (l. 11 [Hopkins 40]).²⁴ While Merton never explicitly refers to the affection and respect of Hopkins for Scotus, the coincidence with his own predilections must have increased his sense of connection with both men, and the affinity of inscape with "*haecceitas*" no doubt provided added support for his own vivid sense of the sacramental potential of each created being to serve as a unique reflection of its divine source.

Patrick F. O'Connell, PhD, Professor in the Departments of English and Theology at Gannon University, Erie, Pa., is coauthor (with William H. Shannon and Christine M. Bochen) of *The Thomas Merton Encyclopedia*.

PART TWO of this article will be printed in the Winter 2018 issue of spiritual life/Online.

END NOTES

1. See Kathleen Deignan, CND, "'Love for the Paradise Mystery': Thomas Merton, Contemplative Ecologist," *CrossCurrents* 58.4 (December 2008), pp. 545–569; Monica Weis, SSJ, "The Wilderness of Compassion: Nature's Influence in Thomas Merton's Writing," *The Merton Annual* 14 (2001) pp. 56–80; Monica Weis, SSJ, "Kindred Spirits in Revelation and Revolution: Rachel Carson and Thomas Merton," *The Merton Annual* 19 (2006), pp. 128–141.
2. Thomas Merton, *Preview of the Asian Journey*, ed. Walter H. Capps (New York: Crossroad, 1989), pp. 105–106; subsequent references will be cited as "PAJ" parenthetically in the text.
3. Thomas Merton, *Witness to Freedom: Letters in Times of Crisis*, ed. William H. Shannon (New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 1994). p. 75; subsequent references will be cited as "WF" parenthetically in the text.
4. Thomas Merton, *Seeds of Contemplation* (New York: New Directions, 1949), p. 24; subsequent references will be cited as "SC" parenthetically in the text. A revised version of this passage is found in Thomas Merton, *New Seeds of Contemplation* (New York: New Directions, 1961), pp. 29–31; subsequent references will be cited as "NSC" parenthetically in the text.

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5. Thomas Merton, *The Seven Storey Mountain* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1948), p. 100; subsequent references will be cited as "SSM" parenthetically in the text.
6. G. F. Lahey, SJ, Gerard Manley Hopkins (London: Humphrey Milford/Oxford University Press, 1930); the letter from Hopkins to John Henry Newman that Merton was reading is on pp. 33–35.
7. Merton also mentions this event in his journal entry for November 27, 1941: see Thomas Merton, *Run to the Mountain: The Story of a Vocation. Journals*, vol. 1: 1939–1941, ed. Patrick Hart (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1995), p. 455; subsequent references will be cited as "RM" parenthetically in the text.
8. In his journal entry for June 1, 1939, Merton writes, "The English Dept. won't let me write on G. M. Hopkins for my Ph.D." (RM 13).
9. In a journal entry for October 19, 1939, Merton noted the precision of Hopkins' observation of natural phenomena compared with his own: "The trees, no leaves. I forget what kind of trees they would be, and that should forbid me forever to think this notebook is in the tradition of G. M. Hopkins!" (RM 61).
10. John Pick, Gerard Manley Hopkins, Priest and Poet (1942; 2nd ed., New York: Oxford University Press, 1966), p. 33; subsequent references will be cited as "Pick" parenthetically in the text. In an unpublished February 12, 1965, letter to Pick, Merton writes, "your book on Hopkins spoke very forcefully to me years ago here" (archives of the Thomas Merton Center, Bellarmine University, Louisville, K.).
11. Gerard Manley Hopkins, *Poems and Prose*, selected and edited by W. H. Gardner (Baltimore: Penguin, 1953), p. 124; subsequent references will be cited as "Hopkins" parenthetically in the text.
12. The significance of inscape for Hopkins' verse can be seen in a poem such as the sonnet "As kingfishers catch fire, dragonflies draw flame," perhaps the most clear and intense poetic description of inscape, with its lines: "Each mortal thing does one thing and the same: / Deals out that being indoors each one dwells; / Selves—goes itself; myself it speaks and spells, / Crying What I do is me: for that I came" (ll. 5–8 [Hopkins 51]). In the projected anthology of religious poetry that he was assembling in the summer of 1941, Merton included this sonnet among seven Hopkins poems (see Patrick F. O'Connell, "Thomas Merton's Projected Anthology of Religious Poetry," *The Merton Seasonal* 25.3 [Fall 2000], pp. 20–28), and echoed it repeatedly in his own verse: see "The Sowing of Meanings" (1947), (ll. 28–30, 36–37 [Thomas Merton, *Figures for an Apocalypse* (New York: New Directions, 1947), p. 85 (subsequent references will be cited as "FA" parenthetically in the text); Thomas Merton, *Collected Poems* (New York: New Directions, 1977), pp. 188–189 (subsequent references will be cited as "CP" parenthetically in the text)); "Canticle for the Blessed Virgin" (1947) (ll. 75–76 [FA 46; CP 163]).
13. Thomas Merton, *Monastic Observances: Initiation into the Monastic Tradition* 5, ed. Patrick F. O'Connell (Collegeville, Minn.: Cistercian Publications, 2010), p. 78. See also, Thomas Merton, *The Behavior of Titans* (New York: New Directions, 1961), p. 92: "It is an intuition of the patterns and harmonies, the 'living character' impressed by life itself, revealing the wisdom of the Living God in the mystery of interplaying movements and changes."
14. Thomas Merton, *Dancing in the Water of Life: Seeking Peace in the Hermitage. Journals*, vol. 5: 1963–1965, ed. Robert E. Daggy (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1997), pp. 291; subsequent references will be cited as "DWL" parenthetically in the text. See also, for example, the sense of heightened awareness and vivid clarity of detail that radiates through the June 1949 journal description of his first afternoon outside the monastic enclosure after being given permission to spend time alone meditating in the woods (Thomas Merton, *Entering the Silence: Becoming a Monk and Writer. Journals*, vol. 2: 1941–1952, ed. Jonathan Montaldo [San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1996], pp. 329; subsequent references will be cited as "ES" parenthetically in the text); the climactic section of the celebrated "Fire Watch" passage of July 4, 1952, from *The*

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- Sign of Jonas (Thomas Merton, *The Sign of Jonas* [New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1953], p. 360; the same passage is also found in ES 486); the experience of interrelatedness that characterizes his new life as a hermit in 1965: "I exist under trees. I walk in the woods out of necessity.... I know there are trees here. I know there are birds here. I know the birds in fact very well, for there are precise pairs of birds (two each of fifteen or twenty species) living in the immediate area of my cabin. I share this particular place with them: we form an ecological balance" (Thomas Merton, *Day of a Stranger* [Salt Lake City: Gibbs M. Smith, 1981], p. 33; subsequent references will be cited as "DS" parenthetically in the text).
15. For an anthology of passages on the natural world from Merton's journals and other works, see Thomas Merton, *When the Trees Say Nothing: Writings on Nature*, ed. Kathleen Deignan, CND (Notre Dame, Ind.: Sorin Books, 2003).
 16. The story of Merton's initial acceptance and eventual rejection by the Franciscans is found in *The Seven Storey Mountain* (261–262, 265–266, 288–292, 294–298); see also Michael Mott, *The Seven Mountains of Thomas Merton* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1984), pp. 123–125, 155–156; subsequent references will be cited as "Mott" parenthetically in the text.
 17. Thomas Merton, *Thirty Poems* (Norfolk, Conn.: New Directions, 1944) [12] (subsequent references will be cited as "TP" parenthetically in the text); CP 42.
 18. Thomas Merton, *The Springs of Contemplation: A Retreat at the Abbey of Gethsemani*, ed. Jane Marie Richardson, SL (New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 1992), pp. 25–26.
 19. In *Merton and Walsh on the Person* (West Palm Beach, FL: Liturgical Publications, 1987), Robert Imperato discusses the importance of Scotus for Walsh, whose 1933 doctoral dissertation from the University of Toronto was entitled "The Metaphysics of Ideas according to Duns Scotus." George Kilcourse has some insightful pages on Merton and Scotus in *Ace of Freedoms: Thomas Merton's Christ* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1993), pp. 30–34.
 20. See ES 31 [12/10/46], 136–137 [11/20/47], 146 [12/16/47], 158 [1/17/48], 162 [1/28/48], 240 [10/31/48].
 21. Thomas Merton and James Laughlin, *Selected Letters*, ed. David D. Cooper (New York: Norton, 1997), p. 12.
 22. Thomas Merton, *The Tears of the Blind Lions* (New York: New Directions, 1949), pp. 25–26; CP 217.
 23. For a thorough discussion of the relation of Scotus and Hopkins, see Pick, pp. 34–36, 151–153; Pick notes that "we must be careful not to consider the influence of Scotus as too positive an initiating force, for Hopkins had been using the word 'inscape' for almost four years before he took Scotus out of the library. It was not that he found something he had not known. He did not become a disciple of Scotus in the sense that a student adopts the teachings of a master; rather, both of them had the same experience of 'form' as sharply individual and particular" (35). See also William Short, OFM, "Pied Beauty: Gerard Manley Hopkins and the Scotistic View of Nature," *The Cord* 45.3 (1995), pp. 27–36.
 24. Merton himself wrote two poems on Scotus: "Duns Scotus" in *Figures for an Apocalypse* (pp. 48–49 [CP 164–165]) and "Hymn for the Feast of Duns Scotus" in *Tears of the Blind Lions* (6–7 [CP 198–199]).



Book Excerpt

Mercy: The Essence of the Gospel and the Key to Christian Life

By **Walter Kasper**

Paulist Press

Paper \$27.15

JESUS EXPOUNDS FOR US the message of the Father's mercy most beautifully in his parables. This is true above all in the parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10: 25–37) and in the parable of the prodigal son (Luke 15: 11–32). These parables have been burned into the memory of humankind and have become downright proverbial.

In the parable of the Good Samaritan, it is significant that Jesus presents us with a Samaritan, of all things, as a model of mercy. The Samaritans were not regarded by Jews of that time as orthodox Jews, but were despised as half heathens. Likewise, it must have provoked Jesus' hearers that first a priest and a Levite walk by the victim lying on the side of the road, without giving it a second thought, while precisely the Samaritan attends to him. He is the one who doesn't thoughtlessly pass by the man lying helplessly on the side of the road, a man who had been brutally beaten by robbers. When he sees the victim, the Samaritan is moved with compassion; he forgets the business matters for which he was underway, bends down in the dirt, provides first aid, and tends to the victim's wounds. In the end, he generously pays the innkeeper in advance for any further expenses and necessary assistance.

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Jesus tells this parable as a response to the question: Who then is my neighbor? His answer is: not someone at a distance, but rather the one for whom you become the neighbor; the one whom you tangibly encounter and who needs your help in this particular situation. Jesus doesn't preach love of those farthest away, but love of those nearest. This love is not confined to family bonds, friendship, religious, or ethnic membership. This love is gauged according to the concrete suffering and needy person who meets us on the way. Jesus goes a step further in the Lucan parables of the prodigal son. With these parables, Jesus is reacting to the grumbling and outrage of the Pharisees and scribes, who are upset that Jesus spends time with sinners and eats with them (Luke 15:2). According to them, by doing so, Jesus transgresses the righteousness prescribed by the law.

But with his parable, Jesus gives the grumblers a lesson. His behavior expresses the greater and higher righteousness of his heavenly Father. To wit, in this parable Jesus says: how he behaves is also how God himself behaves in relation to sinners or those who were then regarded as such. That is eminently expressed in the parable of the prodigal son, which is more appropriately described as the parable of the merciful Father (Luke 15:11–32). Admittedly, the words “justice” and “mercy” do not occur in the parable. But the entire drama is described there, the drama that plays out between the father's love and the waywardness of the son, who squandered his father's inheritance through dissolute and debauched living, thereby losing his

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rights as a son. He can no longer make any justified claims on his father. Nonetheless, the father is a father and remains the son's father, just as the son is a son and remains his son. So the father remains faithful to himself and thereby also faithful to his son. When he sees his son at a distance returning home, the father is moved with compassion (Lk 15:20).

The son admittedly has squandered his father's estate, has forfeited his rights as a son, and damaged his dignity as a son, but he has not lost them. So the father does not wait for his son, but goes toward him, puts his arms around him, and kisses him. By putting on him his best robe and placing a ring on his hand, the father reinstates him as his son. The father returns to him his rights as a son and acknowledges anew his dignity as a son. He thereby bestows on the son not only life-giving relationships, just as the son had hoped; the father's mercy exceeds every anticipated measure. His mercy takes its bearings not from the fair allocation of material goods, but rather from the dignity of the son. It is the measuring stick of the father's love.

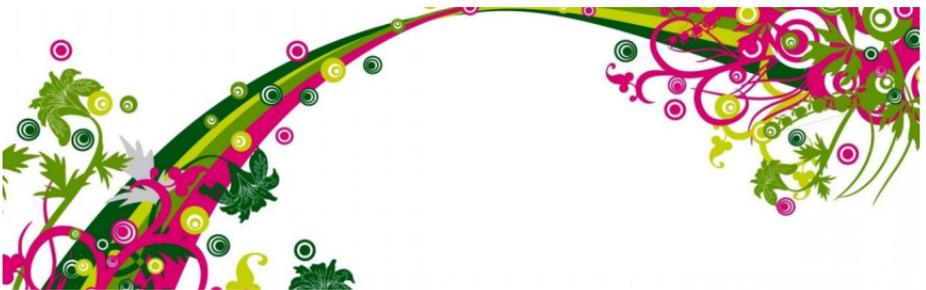
In no other parable has Jesus described so masterfully God's mercy as in this one. For in this parable Jesus wants to say: "Just as I act, so too does the Father act." The Father's mercy in this parable is the higher form of justice. We can also say: mercy is the most perfect realization of justice. Divine mercy leads human beings to "a return to the truth about themselves." God's mercy does not humiliate the person: "The relationship of mercy is based on the common experience of that good

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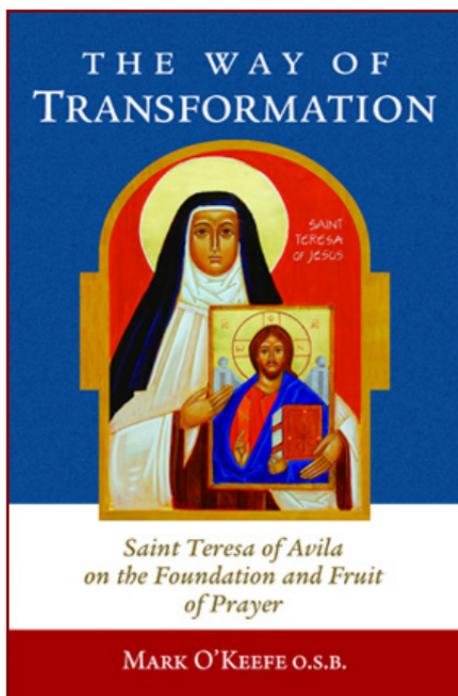
which is man, on the common experience of the dignity that is proper to him.”

The parable of the good Samaritan as well as the parable of the prodigal son have become proverbial. Talk of the compassionate Samaritan has, in fact, transcended the Christian and ecclesial realm and has become a name for diverse aid organizations and emergency services.

It would be wrong, however, to construe the message of the parables in terms of a universal humanism. The parables serve to elucidate Jesus' own behavior as an expression of the behavior of the Father in heaven. He wants to say: “Just as I act, so too does God himself act.” Who sees him, sees the Father (Jn 14:7,9). In him the goodness and loving kindness of God our savior appear (Titus 3:4). In him we have a high priest, who can empathize with our weakness, who in every respect has been tested as we are, but has not sinned (Heb 4:15). Jesus also wants to say to us: your story is told in the story of the prodigal son. You yourself are this prodigal son; you too must repent. But have no fear. God himself comes to meet you and takes you in his arms. He does not humiliate you; rather, he gives you back your dignity as a son or daughter.



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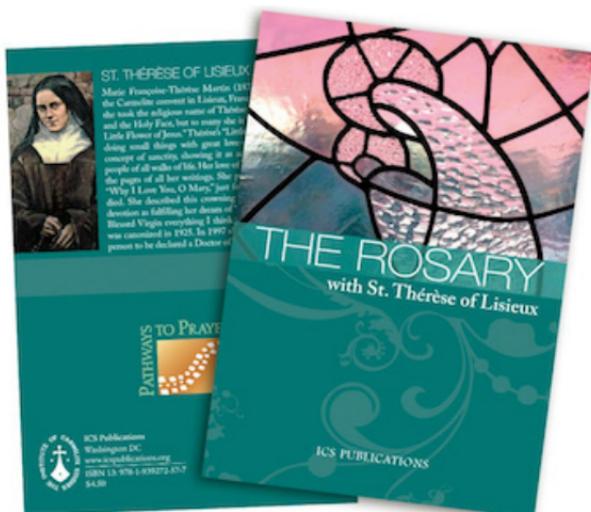


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