

Ch. Abdul Aziz of Karachi, Pakistan, has been a life-long student of mysticism, especially Sufism. When Louis Massignon, the well-known French Orientalist, visited Karachi in 1959, Aziz asked him for the name of some genuine Christian saint and contemplative mystic. Massignon gave him Merton's name and address, describing him, as Aziz recalls, as "*simurgh*" (the king of the soaring birds, in Persian mythology). His correspondence with Abdul Aziz and his study of the books he sent him inspired Merton to give a series of lectures to the monks at Gethsemani on Sufism.

## CENTERED ON FAITH: AN EXCERPT

From a Letter of Thomas Merton to Abdul Aziz

January 2, 1966

...Now you ask about my method of meditation. 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 His love. This is to say that 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." Yet it does not mean imagining anything or conceiving a precise image of God, for to my mind this would be a kind of idolatry. On the contrary, it is a matter of adoring Him as invisible and infinitely beyond our comprehension, and realizing Him as all. My prayer tends very much toward what you call *fana*. 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 out of the center of Nothing and Silence. If I am still present "myself" this I recognize as an obstacle about which I can do nothing unless He Himself removes the obstacle. If He wills He can then make the Nothingness into a total clarity. If He does not will, then the Nothingness seems to itself to be an object and remains an obstacle. Such is my ordinary way of prayer, or meditation. It is not "thinking about" anything, but a direct seeking of the Face of the Invisible, which cannot be found unless we become lost in Him who is Invisible. I do not ordinarily write about such things and I ask you therefore to be discreet about it. But I write this as a testimony of confidence and friendship. It will show you how much I appreciate the tradition of Sufism. Let us therefore adore and praise God and pray to Him for the world which is in great trouble and confusion. I am united with you in prayer during this month of Ramadan and will remember you on the Night of Destiny. I appreciate your prayers for me. May the Most High God send His blessing upon you and give you peace.