

## **Seeds of the Spirit: A Charismatic Reading of *New Seeds of Contemplation***

By **Andy Lord**

The Holy Spirit is both vitally present in all things and yet works seemingly just out of sight, hidden from casual view. Thus it is not surprising that studies of Merton often miss the Person kept to the fringes of the story.<sup>1</sup> Yet without this Person, life in God would not be remotely possible. To uncover the workings of this Person, this Holy Spirit of God, requires a different kind of attention to the written works of Merton. It needs an apparently unnatural bringing into the light of themes Merton may seem to skim over or rework, using different language that obscures links to the Spirit. This cannot be done without also seeking to make our study alive to the reader, for to study the Spirit is to be open to letting God shape our lives in the way of Jesus. Here we take one significant later work of Merton, *New Seeds of Contemplation*,<sup>2</sup> and seek to draw out the understanding and working of the Holy Spirit through this book. This can be thought of as a charismatic reading, recognizing the focus on encountering the Holy Spirit in that tradition.<sup>3</sup> This requires attention to the explicit mention of the work of the Spirit within the overall flow of the writing from start to finish. It also requires openness to understanding the Spirit when he is not explicitly mentioned yet is implicitly unavoidable. Reading the book in this way is not to devalue other studies of this vital work<sup>4</sup> but rather to seek things that have been missed which can then be brought into conversation with other ways of reading. It is a reading that attempts to inspire rather than simply to provide a critical or systematic assessment of what Merton wrote. This is more in line with the style of much of Merton's writing, providing a positive reading that is then brought into critical dialogue with the approach of William Shannon.

### **Starting and Ending with the Spirit**

Key themes in any book are often highlighted near the start and end of the work, setting the scene and drawing things together. Merton's focus throughout *New Seeds* is on the contemplative life, approached from a variety of angles and with a rich number of insights that arise from his own contemplative practice. His is not a neat set of bullet points on how to live a contemplative life with God but rather an acknowledgement that we live rich lives that are beyond neat systems of understanding and yet can be appreciated from various viewpoints. At times logic doesn't hold these views (or our lives) together well and Merton is sometimes accused of being overly diffuse or incoherent. Yet the link between these different ways of exploring life is the foundational Gift of God – the Holy Spirit.<sup>5</sup> It is the Gift of the merciful God to us, rather than our own work and effort to hold things together. In other words, it is the Gift of the creating Spirit who “dwells in us, and we in Him” (*NSC* 5). The Holy Spirit is the creative gifted Presence of God in us who leads us to a deep inner knowledge



**Andy Lord**

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**Andy Lord** is an Anglican priest serving three parishes in the Diocese of Southwell and Nottingham, UK. He holds a Ph.D. in Pentecostal Ecclesiology from the University of Birmingham, UK and has written on Merton in conversation with charismatics in *Transforming Renewal: Charismatic Renewal and Thomas Merton* (Wipf & Stock, 2015). He is also the author of *Network Church* (Brill, 2010) and *Spirit-Shaped Mission* (Paternoster, 2005).

that we are “children of God” (Rom. 8:14). The Holy Spirit is a Gift, One who dwells in us, who grants knowledge and who transforms us in the way of Jesus. Contemplative life with God is a life beyond easy description and yet a natural life in the world that by the Spirit is “completed, elevated, transformed and fulfilled” in us (*NSC* 5). Here we have the scene set for our life with God – a contemplative life lived through the Gift of the Holy Spirit who in often hidden and mysterious ways leads us creatively to Jesus to allow Him to act more freely through us in different ways.

Contemplative life in the Spirit is a life of play in the world which God created – so Merton suggests at the end of *New Seeds*. Rather than aiming at a life of understanding we are called to enter into the “mysterious, cosmic dance” of the Lord (*NSC* 296). In this dance the reality of God becomes more important than our desire to be in control, our tendency to over-analyze, and even the realities of struggle, suffering and despair that so often overtake us. In place of these we are called to find “echoes” of the Lord at work in wonderful starlight nights, migrating birds and the innocence of children. We are awakened to the work of God in all the particularities of life and so join in the celebration of the world. There is both a vital reality and yet a hidden mystery to this, a sudden understanding of the Lord and yet something we cannot fathom. Theologically this is often expressed in terms of the cataphatic and apophatic working of God – God as known in both clarity and hiddenness, light and darkness.<sup>6</sup> Yet in all things we have a choice, the choice of faith: to turn to the reality of God at work in the world and turn away from what is false. Merton often phrases this in terms of turning from a false exterior self and choosing to recognize the more hidden inner true self that is carried by the Holy Spirit, the love of Christ. In the contemplative life we are granted the Gift of the Spirit who carries us and who is ultimately seen in terms of love. Yet at the same time we have a choice to make – to engage our wills to enter into the cosmic dance that recognizes God at work in all things.

### **Reading *New Seeds* from Seen to Unseen and Back**

Merton thus carefully frames *New Seeds* through an understanding of pneumatology, the Holy Spirit just out of sight and yet at work in all things. The Spirit is the personal Gift of God, the Presence of God with us, our guide and transformer through life, who is above all love. He is the Spirit of Jesus Christ who ever leads us to Christ in order that we may be transformed more and more into his likeness. We are asked to respond in faith – to choose to recognize and become awake to the manifold work of God’s creative action in the world by the Spirit; to turn away from all that is false and seek the true; to allow ourselves to be carried by the love of God. It is with this framework in mind that we can then better understand and enter into the shafts of light that *New Seeds* seeks to bring to the contemplative life. I want to suggest a general direction of movement through the book in which Merton starts with what is seen and moves towards what is unseen before returning to address the more visible and lived aspects of the contemplative life. This can be seen as a move from the cataphatic to the apophatic to how these approaches are integrated in life. This can only be a general guide, as Merton tends to integrate as he goes, and the cataphatic does not remove a sense of hiddenness nor the apophatic a sense of being known.

Following the title of the book, Merton places the contemplative life in the context of the continual work of God, the seeds available to be seen (with faith) in all things (see *NSC* 14-20). These are the echoes of the dance of God that come by the Spirit and communicate the word of God – a subtle link to Christ the Word, based on Jesus’ parable of the sower (Mt. 13:1-23). Such seeds are referred to as being those of love that bring new life, a “spiritual vitality” (*NSC* 14) – as if the Spirit searches out ways of highlighting the love of God at work in every situation, both in times

of need and in times of plenty (cf. Phil. 4:12). What is asked of us is for these seeds to “take root” (*NSC* 17) in us through a faith that receives the gifts of love that are offered. This is often referred to elsewhere as the practice of attentiveness to God in all things.<sup>7</sup> Attentive to the Spirit, our hearts are encouraged as we discover more of the love of God in our everyday lives and live more within the cosmic dance of the Lord. The Spirit works almost to tease us into the dancing life with God through glimpses of love.

Yet we have to be careful in understanding the nature of this love – it is a holy love and not simply a set of good feelings. The Holy Spirit brings seeds of love that are received into our whole selves, notably our wills. Love elicits in us a response: love is an action and not simply a feeling. This is the kind of love seen in marriage that brings together feelings and commitment seen in the way couples relate – the kind of love described in 1 Corinthians 13, a passage sandwiched between chapters considering the work of the Spirit. It is the kind of love that Jesus speaks about to his disciples in John 15 – a love of God that elicits obedience to Jesus’ command to love others and comes with the promise of the Holy Spirit. It is through the gift of the Spirit glimpsed in love that people are stimulated to give the gift of love to others, through a will joined to the commands of God. This is a union with God that is experienced through wills transformed by love, and Merton stresses the importance of the personal and close nature of God’s will (see *NSC* 15).<sup>8</sup> He then naturally links this with the call to be true, and we can see here how glimpsing the Spirit at work in something outside of us can elicit a love that moves our inner wills in the direction of greater truth, hence making more real our true inner selves. Although not explicitly referenced here, it seems clear that the Spirit of Truth (cf. Jn. 16) is in Merton’s mind and here he brings together truth and love, God and humanity in a union that leads to transformed action.<sup>9</sup>

Holiness then comes through the way the Spirit is at work in all things, moving them in the direction of their true identity through love. It is less a kind of objective judgment based on the externals than an acknowledgement of the work of God in all of life. The work of the Spirit in all things leads naturally to the conclusion that “Everything That Is, Is Holy” (*NSC* 21). It stops us from seeing created “things” as separate from a “God” who is holy, and from seeing ourselves as “holy” and others as “unholy.” Rather we see the love of God in all things and connecting all things, leading to joy and praise of God. Here Merton is describing a holistic approach, using the theme of love within a framework of understanding the work of the Holy Spirit, and this only makes sense if love and the Spirit are recognized as different ways of identifying the similar working of God. This Spirit of creative love creates movement towards an identity that brings praise to God (see *NSC* 29-36). Again, what is required of people is to respond to this love in faith, to freely choose the way of truth and reality. This is a step-by-step process as we respond to the seeds of the Spirit in every moment. It is a journey with a certain amount of clarity – for love and truth are made visible in lives – yet also with a certain amount of secret hiddenness – for our identities are ultimately held by God and only revealed a step at a time. Holiness is then a life lived in active response to the work of God that takes us in the direction of truth and praise. This is sustained by the loving Holy Spirit of truth who is responded to in faith.

Such a holy life is thus lived outwardly amongst others in the world and yet has a hidden reality that is rooted in God. How are we to describe such a hidden reality, and how are we to nurture it? Merton attempts in different ways to describe this as a place of God where the triune God is at work in our lives as we consent to Him (see *NSC* 37-46). This place is described as a sanctuary, as a point of dependence on God’s love, as a center, as the depths and as our soul or heart – a variety of terms being used to capture the sense of an inner place. We could try to pin down this terminology more

but it is clear that Merton stresses rather the active work of God in this place, however we speak of it. A better way might be to imagine such a place rather than conceptualize it – perhaps seeing ourselves entering a palace of God or a place of paradise.<sup>10</sup> This is described as how the “Father, dwelling in the depths of all things and in my own depths, communicates to me His Word and His Spirit” (*NSC* 40). It is the “mission of the Word and the Spirit, from the Father” (*NSC* 42) by which we are awakened to our true identity as children of God and heirs of his Kingdom. Here the Spirit is placed within a trinitarian outlook, one that is not developed but seems to implicitly pick up on the image of “the two hands of the Father” suggested by Irenaeus.<sup>11</sup> The mission of Word and Spirit is the glory of the Father revealed in us, the salvation of God that reflects his infinite concern and love for us. There is something life-stretching about the work of the Father’s Word and Spirit at work in us, which expands our horizons and inspires our choices. At the same time it is something known only in smallness – for God’s great glory is revealed through a process of emptying. This is the *kenosis* that is seen in Philippians 2:5-8, where Christ empties himself to come in human likeness and to die before being raised to the place of glory and authority. Thus the place of God in us is first of all a place of emptiness or even nothingness, so as to be a place where God comes in littleness and empties himself into our lives that we might be filled with the fullness of glory and discover more of our true self-identity. Here we see the great mercy of God revealed in us, inviting our consent to his ways of love and service. It is to practice humility and have that inner place occupied with the simplicity of love, which is the work of the Spirit linked to Christ in us.

This way of holiness through humility and the working of the Spirit requires that we see ourselves always in relationship to others. Merton contrasts this way with those who fill their inner place with the fire of pride and self-admiration rather than the fire of the Holy Spirit (see *NSC* 48-49). Such people are very active and seem to do much for God, yet are not following “the unction of the Holy Spirit” (*NSC* 50) and become divided from those they are seeking to serve. Rather, by the Spirit we are to grow into unity with others as we share the image of the one God (see *NSC* 52-53). This image is that of love, found in the hidden place of God and through us goes out to others. This is the way of humility that admires others and finds freedom and joy in not worrying about our own works and reputation. Solitude can enable this transforming encounter with the love of God which here seems equivalent to the fire of the Holy Spirit. Yet it can only do so if we have first given ourselves to others in love and have discovered the love of God, the Spirit of God as our life together and the life of God in us (see *NSC* 64). Here Merton develops the understanding of the Holy Spirit from holiness and truth to love and now to unity. He uses the image of a “sea of Love” (*NSC* 65) that flows through the elect and is the greater reality of contemplative experience. Of course, as before, this is both known and yet hidden – there is a clear love that is known and transforms us and yet this love is also obscure and even dark. On earth the love that joins all believers is imperfect and at times we have simply to stand on faith that it is so. Contemplation through solitude is an entrance into the clear and yet hidden love of God, the sea of love, the fire of the Spirit.

This then causes Merton to consider further the nature of the Trinity. To allow the Spirit to work is to be led into that perfect contemplation that is the life of the Trinity (see *NSC* 67-69). Love is not the exclusive characteristic of the Spirit but is the descriptor of the one God – the unity of God being of vital importance to Merton. The infinite love of this one God is always perfectly given and received by Father, Son and Holy Spirit in an infinite and inexhaustible way. There is an “overflowing and superabounding” (*NSC* 69) love and joy in the trinitarian life and contemplation is presented as

a way into this loving joy as we enter the place of God and receive from the Spirit at work, and as we give in offering selfless love to others. It is this faith in God's love for us that is needed before all else if we are to demonstrate love to the "Body of broken bones" (*NSC 72*) that is humanity today. The world, and even the church, is full of differences that drive people apart and leave people "weak, lost and isolated" (*NSC 72*). Without being led by the Spirit into God's overflowing love the alternative is to offer love from a place of sin and unworthiness, ultimately an offer rooted in hate. We are to love without concern for unworthiness in ourselves or others. Yet through contemplation we are able to face the demand of compassionate love for all people, particularly those very different from ourselves. We might say that the inflow and the outflow of the Spirit come together in us as we offer ourselves before the Trinity in contemplation.

It is only having appreciated the Spirit coming to us in all creation, connecting us with other people and leading us into the trinitarian life of compassionate love that Merton then turns to the importance of solitude (see *NSC 80-83*). He wants to make sure we understand the cosmic extent of the work of the Holy Spirit in overflowing love before addressing the practical need for "[p]hysical solitude, exterior silence and real recollection" (*NSC 80*). Solitude is the way into the place of God already mentioned, the center of the soul, the empty abyss of deep hunger and desire that is only satisfied in God. Practically, such inner solitude needs an appropriate outer place where this is possible – perhaps a room, a quiet corner or a peaceful church. Of course solitude is possible anywhere but particular places encourage and deepen the practice and also stop us from rushing on with the next thing pretending we have inner solitude when we don't. These need to be guarded as places of "active passivity in understanding and love" (*NSC 86*) if there is to be light, liberation and freedom. Noise, illegitimate pleasures, overindulged appetites, inappropriate TV and inordinate attachment to sexual pleasure all get in the way of developing a purity of heart that is attentive to God. In other words, seeing and responding to the Spirit requires guarded space where distractions are reduced and we can attend to love.

In addition to personal temptations there are also religious systems that prevent this focus on love by shifting Christian focus onto sin. Such systems carry the "Moral Theology of the Devil" (see *NSC 90-97*) and have little space in them for the work of the Holy Spirit. Concepts of "sin, suffering, damnation, punishment, the justice of God, retribution, the end of the world" (*NSC 92*) dominate and shape the understanding of God's work in the world. In this system, by creating the world God knew the inevitability of sin and it was so planned that God could manifest his justice by sending his Son to be murdered on the cross. Thus the Son welcomed the punishment of the Father, with the cross a symbol of judgment rather than of mercy, which has no place. Faith becomes a kind of magic that we assert to be delivered from punishment for our sin. The distinction between good and evil is exaggerated, causing people to see themselves (by faith) as all good and therefore others as evil. War and persecution naturally follow. This is the hell that is simply life (and death) without mercy in the presence of the devil who rules. Such religious systems need to be recognized and resisted. This is easier given places set aside to focus on the Spirit of love, mercy and peace who keeps our theology in more truthful shape.

Adoption of religious systems that purport to bring perfection is a common temptation in monastic and wider Christian life. We can become too busy keeping external rules and striving to achieve "holiness" through our action that we don't become who we are (see *NSC 98-103*). In contrast, the saint seeks to take what helps them to find God and leave aside the rest. It takes "heroic humility to be

yourself” as “God intended you to be” (*NSC* 100) and this is perfect integrity. Hence the importance of the place or sanctuary of God’s love that Merton identified earlier. Resting in this reality enables us to take risks: the risk of frustration, of upsetting others and of new life (see *NSC* 104-106). The struggle of faith to get beyond evil and seek new life arises not out of busyness but from the place of God’s working. This also enables letting go of resentment and of fixed stances against the state of things, without giving in to unhealthy systems whether religious or secular. As Merton develops things here there is no explicit reference to the work of the Holy Spirit and yet it links well with his emphasis on how the Holy Spirit confers on us the reality of divine Sonship (see *NMI* 175) that identifies us with the only-begotten Son of God (see *RU* 84). The question of true identity in God requires humility, linking back to the place of love and the importance of the Spirit’s work in joining us to Christ. Merton here tackles various interrelated subjects and yet we can discern a tension in these chapters between the “place of the Holy Spirit” (of humility, integrity, love, peace, true identity) and the “place of the devil” (of evil, hatred, retribution, systems of control, busyness, false identity, fear, resentment, war). We find ourselves in both places and Merton is issuing a nuanced prophetic call to return to the “place of the Holy Spirit,” the sanctuary of love wherein we can be humbly still and discern God’s true ways.

So we see Merton moving in humility to help those who are caught up in fear that is the cause of all war (see *NSC* 112-19). Fear engulfs everything, all about ourselves and others, and we find ourselves hating who we are and what others are like. Through fear we might find ourselves caught up with the focus on evil that is the devil’s theology. As this affects us, even good purposes and motivations can lead to bad results. The only way out is to move towards the place of love, for only love (taken as the same as humility here) can “exorcise the fear that is the root of all war” (*NSC* 119). Such love requires admission of the failings of all nations, including our own, with prayer that all would cease from ways that make war inevitable. The divine place of love nurtures the desire for peace. We might expect here reference to the Spirit of peace (cf. Rom. 8:6, 14:7; Gal. 5:22) but again perhaps Merton’s emphasis on the *hidden* way the Spirit works is seen here in the lack of explicit reference to the Spirit.<sup>12</sup> It is not just that Christians are called to turn from ways of fear that lead to war to the divine place of love, but even in places of war we can discover God’s place of love. In places of hatred that set one against another in hell-like war it is possible for God to see “those who love one another” to be “drawn and fused together in the heroism of charity under suffering” (*NSC* 123). Thus the fire that characterizes hell is less than the consuming fire that is the God who transforms us by love into himself in everlasting joy. This is the fire of the Spirit that John the Baptist refers to (Lk. 3:16) and Merton explores elsewhere.<sup>13</sup> Those who stick to their hatred and resist this fire choose to have this Spirit-fire as their everlasting enemy that becomes a torment and destruction. Such sinners are boring people, hating others and living a life “full of betrayal, full of illusion, full of deception” (*NSC* 125) and are best forgotten after their death. Such people sadly often fill the political history of modern humanity.

I have suggested that *New Seeds* starts with exploring how the seeds of the holy love of the Spirit in all life lead naturally to developing a place to encounter the Spirit in contemplative silence. Merton then shifts to consider further how this place is in tension with the place of the devil in individual, community and national life. The crucial question we face is this: how are we to enter into and grow through this creative contemplative place? Here Merton, in an almost Protestant way, turns to the importance of personal faith (see *NSC* 126-30).<sup>14</sup> There needs to be an “assent of faith” in response

to the communication of God (in the seeds of love). This is of vital importance: “Ultimately faith is the only key to the universe. The final meaning of human existence, and the answers to questions on which all our happiness depends cannot be reached in any other way” (*NSC* 130). Merton is careful to say that faith isn’t a kind of (Protestant?) conviction based solely on rational analysis, nor a (pietist?) emotion or feeling. It involves the intellect yet is also “a communion of wills” (*NSC* 128) in which we say Yes to God through love. Statements about faith can help point us in the right direction, as can a felt sense of God. But assenting to resting in love is the foundational image.

Having articulated an approach to faith based largely on a cataphatic approach, Merton quickly qualifies this by drawing out some apophatic themes that have been hinted at on the way through the theme of hiddenness.<sup>15</sup> Faith cannot rely ultimately on reason or experience because the living God “lies infinitely beyond the reach of anything our eyes can see or our minds can understand” (*NSC* 131). While reason, experience and the authority of the church are important for faith, it ultimately rests on God who infuses even our faith. If we yield to resting in the God who is infinitely beyond us then we find ourselves drawn beyond our understanding and experience into more uncertain and stretching places in which seeking God alone becomes primary. In more Protestant language, we might say that we are drawn into relying more on grace centered on the mystery of the cross of Jesus, rather than our ability to think or practice our way through life.<sup>16</sup> The classic spiritual term that Merton turns to is that of “darkness” – shaped, naturally, by the writings of St. John of the Cross. This darkness involves a sense of weakness before the greatness of God, leading to less reliance on created images and concepts and a certain obscurity in faith. At the same time there is a growing depth to faith rooted in communion with God in which the known and the unknown (the cataphatic and the apophatic), the conscious and the unconscious, overlap and find integration according to love. It is a mystery of darkness and yet also an experience of infinite light. Merton in his different works approaches this mystery from different angles in trying to explain the unexplainable. Here he draws it together as the way in which the human spirit and the Holy Spirit become one in the balanced “spiritual life” (see *NSC* 140-41). It is life lived, as he says elsewhere, through “the graces and inspirations of the Holy Spirit” on the path of “humility, obscurity, and emptiness.”<sup>17</sup> Here lies the life of wisdom, of *Sophia* and Sophianic love, a life in Christ by the Spirit which is not reliant on and yet embraces reason and experience (see *NSC* 141).<sup>18</sup>

Merton continues in *New Seeds* to consider various aspects of the contemplative life in Christ before concluding by bringing the cataphatic and apophatic together within our being carried by the Spirit in the dance of the Lord, as noted earlier. There is more that could be read from this but for the present my reading of *New Seeds* is sufficient to be brought into conversation with a different reading.

### **Comparison of Readings**

William Shannon is the obvious person with whom to enter into conversation, since he was a distinguished scholar of Merton and wrote on *New Seeds* in relation to Merton’s wider writing on contemplation (Shannon, *Paradise Journey* 153-82).<sup>19</sup> He draws particular attention to the start and end of *New Seeds* in a way that reflects my approach although he then focuses on the particular issues of the true and false self and the nature of faith. This similar but different approach to mine offers a fruitful dialogue. Whereas I start my reading by noting God’s foundational Gift of the Holy Spirit at the start of *New Seeds* that enables the cosmic dance in all its vitality at the end of the book, Shannon emphasizes human experience and the incomprehensible Reality of the divine. He picks up on shifts in Merton’s thinking away from the systematic and scholastic towards Christian personalism with

insights from Zen (see Shannon, *Paradise Journey* 159-61). This brings a broad understanding of experience informed by Merton's much wider contacts with others round the world than was the case earlier in his monastic life. Contemplative experience involves a sense of "heightened consciousness" in which Reality (the divine) is somehow intuitively grasped (see Shannon, *Paradise Journey* 164). Shannon notes that Merton does not rush to define such an approach to contemplation, unlike in his earlier works, stressing that contemplation goes "beyond" definitions and we know by unknowing (see Shannon, *Paradise Journey* 164-65). This naturally brings the apophatic tradition to the fore and Shannon sees Merton as being "strongly convinced" that ultimately the cataphatic "must yield place to apophaticism" (Shannon, *Paradise Journey* 15). In contrast, my reading raises the question as to whether Merton had a more integrated approach to bringing together the cataphatic and apophatic than Shannon allows. Might not an understanding of the Holy Spirit as the personal Gift at work transforming all yet elusive and often hidden provide a good foundation for holistic contemplation? This would also acknowledge more the Christian biblical tradition in which Merton was steeped, in which Reality is not just completely beyond us but also a personal and revealing Reality. Where we start in reading Merton is significant to what we then find.

Shannon turns from contemplative experience to how this results in the discovery of the true self, for in his reading of Merton "contemplative spirituality [is seen] in terms of the disappearance of the false, external self, which is ultimately illusory, and the emergence of the true self – the self we are before God" (Shannon, *Paradise Journey* 166). This picks up on Merton's emphasis on the personal rather than the individual that I noted in my reading, and focuses on personal freedom (see Shannon, *Paradise Journey* 166-69). This is a freedom not for separateness from others but a freedom to love that brings unity. We thus have to be awakened to our true self in God without being overly negative about our false self which, in God's hands, can form part of the journey. Here Shannon focuses on a particular issue he feels is central to *New Seeds* whereas I trace a reading that moves through the chapters in a way that draws out the themes of holiness and our relatedness to others that might otherwise be overlooked. This draws out Merton's contrast between the holy fire of the Spirit and the unholy fire of pride and self-admiration that needs to be overcome. There is a real turning from evil and not just an awakening to the good and true. How we read the flow of Merton's work and particular themes within this flow (or separate to it) will shape our understanding of what Merton is seeking to communicate.

The place of faith in this move towards the true self is then explored by Shannon, who suggests that Merton was moving beyond faith as simply intellectual assent. The importance of faith has been repeatedly noted in my reading which illustrates a commonality in reading. It is at this point in Shannon's discussion that he recognizes the work of the Holy Spirit as the "higher principle" in faith (Shannon, *Paradise Journey* 174). Merton's understanding of faith is not just about instinct or reason but transcends these in the principle of the Spirit, seen in Paul's call to the Galatians to "live by the Spirit" (Gal. 5:25, 6:1). Faith is thus linked with the Spirit in lives lived in union with God: "Such a person, living by faith and united with God in the Spirit, is the true self. It is the contemplative person" (Shannon, *Paradise Journey* 175). This naturally leads Shannon into his consideration of the final chapter of *New Seeds*, one of the "unique pieces of Merton writing" (Shannon, *Paradise Journey* 175). Here we have the cosmic dance seen in terms of "God's presence in the universe, drawing us out of life's seeming dualities by enabling us to discover our true reality by finding our oneness with God" (Shannon, *Paradise Journey* 176). This points in an eschatological direction towards a



renewed earthly paradise. The eschatological aspect of Shannon’s reading challenges my reading to consider further this theme, very familiar in charismatic theology. Only a robust eschatology can bring together the seeds of the Spirit seen in the present with the fullness of life promised for the future. Yet this does require a broadening of understanding of the Spirit from Shannon’s focus on personal faith and union. This focus has been traditional but is being challenged from many directions, notably with concerns for the environment, liberation and peace – concerns that resonate with those of Merton.<sup>20</sup> The creational and public working of the Spirit underlies my reading of Merton whose “seeds” come from the foundational gift of the Spirit who is seen at work in all things. Although Merton’s understanding of the Spirit was shaped by the thinking of the time, my reading suggests that he glimpsed something of the way pneumatology would develop.

### Conclusion

In my reading of *New Seeds* I have drawn the work of the Holy Spirit from the fringe to a more central place. I have termed this a charismatic reading and the aim has been to read through *New Seeds* highlighting how encountering the Spirit might relate to what Merton is saying. This has suggested that Merton anticipated, if almost in passing, some of the later holistic developments in pneumatology. It also appears to bring together cataphatic and apophatic approaches to contemplation in which each is valued within the working of the transforming Gift of the Spirit. Practically, we are encouraged to develop imaginative places of dwelling in the Spirit, to resist evil and express faith. This contrasts with the reading of Shannon which, I have suggested, assumes a more limited understanding of the Spirit and is focused on particular key themes. His reading gives more depth to understanding the development of Merton’s thinking and highlights the importance of eschatology but is more focused than the reading suggested here. A charismatic reading of Merton promises to discover fresh ways in which he integrates aspects of God’s action in all things through contemplation for the transformation of the world. This needs to be further tested against a wider range of Merton’s writing and in conversation with other studies on pneumatology. We have glimpsed some of the seeds of the Spirit that Merton highlights and can be encouraged to seek out more.

1. See my earlier argument in Andy Lord, “Thomas Merton and the Quest for the Holy Spirit,” *The Merton Seasonal* 39.2 (2014) 3-12. For an overview of the topic, see Patrick F. O’Connell, “Holy Spirit,” in William H. Shannon, Christine M. Bochen and Patrick F. O’Connell, *The Thomas Merton Encyclopedia* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2002) 207-10; subsequent references will be cited as “*Encyclopedia*” parenthetically in the text.
2. Thomas Merton, *New Seeds of Contemplation* (New York: New Directions, 1961); subsequent references will be cited as “NSC” parenthetically in the text.
3. See Mark J. Cartledge, *Encountering the Spirit: The Charismatic Tradition* (London: Darton, Longman, Todd, 2006).
4. The significance of this work and other ways of reading it are given in William H. Shannon, “*New Seeds of Contemplation*” (*Encyclopedia* 324-25).
5. The importance of the Holy Spirit as Gift is explored elsewhere by Merton in terms of the myth of Prometheus: see Thomas Merton, *The New Man* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Cudahy, 1961) 23-48; Thomas Merton, *Raids on the Unspeakable* (New York: New Directions, 1966) 78-88 (subsequent references will be cited as “RU” parenthetically in the text).
6. On these dimensions as found in *New Seeds* see William H. Shannon, *Thomas Merton’s Paradise Journey: Writings on Contemplation* (Cincinnati: St. Anthony Messenger Press, 2000) 153-82; subsequent references will be cited as “Shannon, *Paradise Journey*” parenthetically in the text.
7. See Robert Waldron, *Thomas Merton: Master of Attention – An Exploration of Prayer* (New York: Paulist Press, 2008). This is also a practice developed in other ways as part of Ignatian spirituality.
8. See also Patrick F. O’Connell, “Love” (*Encyclopedia* 270).

9. Merton addresses the work of the Spirit of truth in a number of places: see for example Thomas Merton, *An Introduction to Christian Mysticism: Initiation into the Monastic Tradition* 3, ed. Patrick F. O'Connell (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 2008) 38; Thomas Merton, *No Man Is an Island* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1955) ix (subsequent references will be cited as “*NMI*” parenthetically in the text).
10. See the use of these images as found respectively in James Finley, *Merton's Palace of Nowhere: A Search for God through Awareness of the True Self* (Notre Dame, IN: Ave Maria Press, 1978) and in Shannon, *Paradise Journey*.
11. For comparison, see the more developed trinitarian Spirit-Christology by the Roman Catholic Ralph del Colle in *Christ and the Spirit: Spirit-Christology in Trinitarian Perspective* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994) 1-29.
12. In this regard it is worth consulting Enda Cunningham, “Grace as the Self-Communication of the Holy Spirit in the Writings of Thomas Merton” [Ph.D. dissertation] (Rome: Pontificae Universitatis Gregorianae, 1995) 6, 14; Merton refers to the “infinitely hidden Spirit” in Thomas Merton, *The Silent Life* (New York: Farrar, Straus & Cudahy, 1957) 3.
13. See Nass Cannon, “Thomas Merton and St. John of the Cross: Lives on Fire,” *The Merton Annual* 21 (2008) 205-13, which argues that we can't separate Merton's understanding of the Spirit from the fire as understood by St. John of the Cross.
14. The importance of this to Merton in relation to Protestant and Pentecostal faith is noted by Kilian McDonnell in “An Interview with Fr. Kilian McDonnell, O.S.B. – February 11, 2005,” ed. Victor A. Kramer, *The Merton Annual* 20 (2007) 275.
15. On these see Shannon, *Paradise Journey* 11-16.
16. On this theme see the mission spirituality of Simon Barrington-Ward, *Love Will Out* (Basingstoke: Marshall Morgan and Scott, 1988).
17. Thomas Merton, *The Inner Experience: Notes on Contemplation*, ed. William H. Shannon (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 2003) 99.
18. On the theme of *Sophia*, viewed from a more Christological perspective, see Christopher Pramuk, *Sophia: The Hidden Christ of Thomas Merton* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2009).
19. Another option would be the detailed study of the work of Donald Grayston which Shannon utilizes in a number of ways (see Donald Grayston, *Thomas Merton: The Development of a Spiritual Theologian* [Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen Press, 1985] and Donald Grayston, *Thomas Merton's Rewritings: The Five Versions of Seeds/New Seeds of Contemplation as a Key to the Development of his Thought* [Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen Press, 1989]). However, this has a more focused purpose in examining the different versions of *New Seeds* with regard to how they illustrate Merton's theological development. Shannon's reading is more general in regard to contemplation and Merton's wider writings even if it is still guided by the desire to trace developments in Merton's understanding.
20. For a comprehensive argument in this direction see Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen, *Spirit and Salvation, A Constructive Christian Theology for the Pluralistic World*, vol. 4 (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2016).