

Doren was attuned to the spiritual dimension of life (being “no stranger to the order of grace”), he likewise does not indicate that Mark Van Doren linked directly insight in literature to the love of God. It would seem, however, that Merton’s reference to Van Doren’s “manner of approach” has a common layer of meaning with the “manner of knowing” consonant with the interior simplicity of St. Bernard. Certainly in preparing Merton, as he says, to receive “the good seed of scholastic philosophy” and in “casting lights that he had not himself foreseen,” Van Doren’s manner of knowing served as one step in Merton’s journey toward greater knowledge and love of God.

The indications of St. Bernard’s influence on Merton’s portrait of Mark Van Doren suggest Merton’s efforts to understand spiritually not only his experience under Van Doren’s mentorship, but also the character of teaching, learning, and knowing. In this respect simplicity and sincerity are not simply natural virtues but a matter of spiritual orientation. The links connecting St. Bernard, Mark Van Doren, and Merton (St. Thomas Aquinas, too!) have then another significance. They remind us of the importance of considering our own “manner of approach,” of rooting our work in education in a spiritual ground, of making education and the effort to know a matter for the whole person, a spiritual activity.

A POEM FOR CONSCIENCE

January 1991

by **Jonathan Sweeney**

And gods
will betray you
before your eyes.
Aflame black white
streaking night
Fire

burst your belly
with war
or —
Paradox.
a
christ of you
Alone
and places of
eternity,
Places.

Leave the desert
and return
and
fol
low
Eternity, Tom
says, in the
palm of
the hand.

□ **Jonathan Sweeney** is a seminary student in Chicago, currently working on his master’s thesis on Wittgenstein and Kierkegaard. This poem is a plea for peace in the Persian Gulf.