

- on “Ascetical and Mystical Theology” given to the young priests in the monastery in Thomas Merton, *An Introduction to Christian Mysticism: Initiation into the Monastic Tradition* 3, ed. Patrick F. O’Connell (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 2008) 15-16; subsequent references will be cited as “*ICM*” parenthetically in the text.
3. Thomas Merton, *The Inner Experience: Notes on Contemplation*, ed. William H. Shannon (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 2003) 37; subsequent references will be cited as “*IE*” parenthetically in the text.
 4. For another example see his emphasis on the personalistic character of Christian contemplation in light of Chalcedonian Christology (*NSC* 153).
 5. See also Thomas Merton, *Zen and the Birds of Appetite* (New York: New Directions, 1968) 45-46.
 6. Louis [Thomas] Merton, “St. Anselm and His Argument,” *The American Benedictine Review* 17 (June 1966) 243.

Final Integration in Thomas Merton: The Art of Finding the Middle Way

By Cristóbal Serrán-Pagán y Fuentes

This brief reflection examines Thomas Merton’s contemplative thoughts on final integration, a term that he borrowed from the Iranian-American psychoanalyst Reza Arasteh. Merton’s holistic model of final integration has its spiritual roots in the Christian mystical tradition that a healthy life of prayer is based on good works when every single act is performed for the greater glory of God. Everything that we do then becomes a prayer, including our work. This new model of final integration in Merton’s spirituality is a call to wisdom that requires a *metanoia*, a radical change of heart in our soul.

One of the greatest influences that the late Merton experienced before his untimely death was through corresponding with Arasteh.¹ Their exchange of ideas and books began in 1965. Merton sent the psychotherapist *The Way of Chuang Tzu*² and received in turn Arasteh’s study of Rumi entitled *Rumi the Persian: Rebirth in Creativity and Love*.³ Merton showed great interest in Arasteh’s approach to Rumi in his usage of a modern tool like psychoanalysis.

By 1968 Merton had read Arasteh’s book entitled *Final Integration in the Adult Personality*.⁴ The Trappist monk gave proper credit to Arasteh for his valuable insights. Merton received great benefits from corresponding with this Sufi-turned-psychologist in his attempt to make sense of his inner experiences. After reading Arasteh’s book, Merton wrote a long essay titled “Final Integration: Toward a ‘Monastic Therapy.’”⁵ Both Merton and Arasteh were interested in developing a holistic model of spirituality that addresses the whole person. Their spirituality is envisioned as a double process of unification (in psychological terms) and of deification (in theological terms). Arasteh’s teachings resonated with Merton in his own spiritual practice.

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The Christian mystic is well aware of the need to attain this inner state of unity, wholeness and holiness with all life. Merton called this spiritual rebirth by the names of the New Man or the New Adam. One of the recurring themes in Merton's writings is this spiritual transformation where the old self must die (*kenosis*) in order for the true self to be born in God (*pleroma*). Now in this *unio mystica* the Divine is seen present in all beings and all beings are present in God. Thus the real goal of Christian mysticism is to help the seeker experience this rebirth in the here and now.

Children of the twenty-first century are desperately crying out for signs of hope and longing for new leaders who can address their social, economic and spiritual needs in humane and compassionate ways. I believe the contemplative message of Merton can help us identify the root cause of our contemporary problems by asking the right questions and move us towards implementing this contemplative vision in a world of action. This deep questioning in search for solutions will require from us a creative response that can directly and effectively address the most urgent problems of our time and at the same time move us from a fragmented existence to a new wholeness. As Merton had clearly stated in "Final Integration," "the finally integrated man is a peacemaker, and that is why there is such a desperate need for our leaders to become such men of insight" (*CWA* 212).

1. See Merton's letters to Arasteh in Thomas Merton, *The Hidden Ground of Love: Letters on Religious Experience and Social Concerns*, ed. William H. Shannon (New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 1985) 40-43.
2. Thomas Merton, *The Way of Chuang Tzu* (New York: New Directions, 1965).
3. A. Reza Arasteh, *Rumi the Persian: Rebirth in Creativity and Love* (Lahore: Ashraf, 1965).
4. A. Reza Arasteh, *Final Integration in the Adult Personality* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1965).
5. Thomas Merton, "Final Integration, Toward a 'Monastic Therapy,'" *Monastic Studies* 6 (1968 87-99; Thomas Merton, *Contemplation in a World of Action* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1971) 205-17; subsequent references will be cited as "*CWA*" parenthetically in the text.

Chanting the Square Demonic

By **Frederick Smock**

Thomas Merton may not appear on the syllabi of many English professors teaching twentieth-century American poetry; however, I always include his "Chant to Be Used in Processions around a Site with Furnaces"¹ in my general education literature courses. On that day, we meet in the Merton Center on my campus, Bellarmine University. I give my students a brief tour, as I sketch out the essential details of his biography. Then we gather around the big table in the library room for a choral reading of "Chant." The brilliant thing about this poem is that it is written in the first person, in the voice of a Nazi death-camp commandant, and in small blocks of prose (as if his story does not merit the lovely lineations of poetry). Thus, as we hand the poem around the table, the students momentarily "become" the commandant. The poem never fails to affect; students are always a bit shaken. Historically, we in the West tend to think of the Nazis as "Others."



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