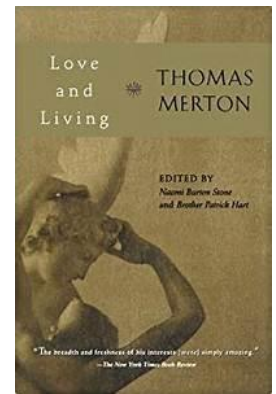
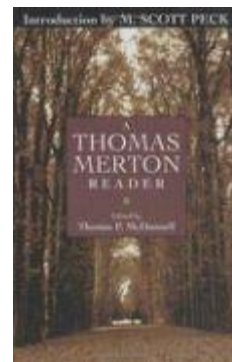
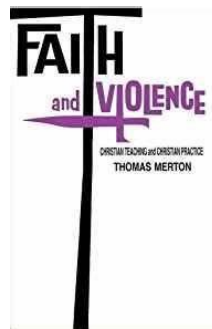
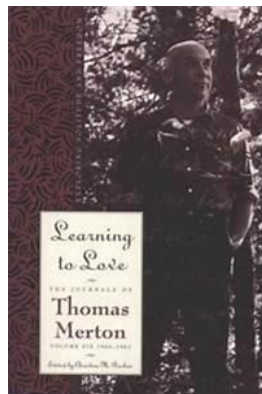


Thomas Merton - A Monks' Insights on Love

Wednesday, May 29, 2019
Our Lady of Calvary Retreat
Center - Farmington CT



Evening's Agenda:

7:00	Opening Silence and Prayer, Introductions and Objectives
7:25	Conference 1: Thomas Merton's Journey to Love
7:40	Break / Questions
7:50	Conference 2: Exploring Merton's Insights on Love <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The Christian Call to Love 2. The Call to Human Love 3. The (Christian) Call to Love in Society – Social Justice and Action. 4. Love Binds Everyone together
8:45	Conclusion and Closing Prayer

Opening Silence, Prayer and Introductions (25)

Opening Prayer (5)

“My Lord God, I have no idea where I am going. I do not see the road ahead of me. I cannot know for certain where it will end. Nor do I really know myself, and the fact that I think that I am following your will does not mean that I am actually doing so. But I believe that the desire to please you does in fact please you. And I hope I have that desire in all that I am doing. I hope that I will never do anything apart from that desire. And I know that if I do this you will lead me by the right road though I may know nothing about it. Therefore will I trust you always though I may seem to be lost and in the shadow of death. I will not fear, for you are ever with me, and you will never leave me to face my perils alone.” Amen! – Thoughts in Solitude

Why are you here and what attracts you to this topic, knowledge about Merton? (5)

What is Love: Your input (5)

What is Love: What does Merton’s have to say? (10)

New Seeds of Contemplation pp 60 – 63:

To say that I am made in the image of God is to say that love is the reason of my existence, for God is love. **Love is my true identity. Selflessness is my true self.** Love is my true character. Love is my name... To find love I must enter into the sanctuary where it is hidden, which is the mystery of God... **I who am without love cannot become love unless Love identifies me with Himself.** But if He sends His own Love, Himself, to act and love in me and in all that I do, then I shall be transformed, **I shall discover who I am and shall possess my true identity by losing myself in Him.**

No Man Is an Island pg 4:

Love not only prefers the good of another to my own, but it does not even compare the two. It has only one good, that of the beloved, which is, at the same time my own. Love shares the good with another not by dividing it with him, but **by identifying itself with him so that his good becomes my own.** The same good is enjoyed in its wholeness by two in one spirit, not halved and shared by two souls... **Love sees its whole good in the good of the beloved,** and to divide that good would diminish love... **love does not seek a joy that follows from its effect: its joy is in the effect itself, which is the good of the beloved...** Love seeks one thing only: the good of the one loved. It leaves all the other secondary effects to take care of themselves. **Love, therefore, is its own reward.**

Wisdom of the Desert pp 18-19:

Love in fact is the spiritual life, and without it all the other exercises of the spirit, however lofty, are emptied of content and become mere illusions... **Love,** of course, **means something much more than mere sentiment,** much more than token favours and perfunctory almsdeeds. **Love means an interior and spiritual identification with one's brother, so that he is not regarded as an "object" to "which" one "does good."** ... **Love takes one's neighbor as one's other self, and loves him with all the immense humility and discretion and reserve and reverence without which no one can presume to enter into the sanctuary of another's subjectivity.** From such love all authoritarian brutality, all exploitation, domineering and condescension must necessarily be absent... **Love demands a complete inner transformation** – for without this we cannot possibly come to identify ourselves with our brother. **We have to become, in some sense, the person we love. And this involves a kind of death of our own being, our own self...** We seek any convenient excuse to break off and give up the difficult task...

Love and Living pp. 34 – 35:

... **love is a positive force, a transcendent spiritual power.** It is, in fact, the deepest creative power in human nature... **It is a living appreciation of life as value and as gift.** It responds to the full richness, the variety, **the fecundity of living experience itself:** it “knows” the inner mystery of life. **It enjoys life as an inexhaustible fortune. Love estimates this fortune in a way that knowledge can never do...** **Love knows, understands, and meets the demands of life insofar as it responds with warmth, abandon and surrender.** **When people are truly in love,** they experience far more than just a mutual need for each other’s company and consolation. In **their relation with each other they become different people: they are more than their everyday selves, more alive, more understanding, more enduring, and seemingly more endowed.** They are made over into new beings. They are transformed by the power of their love. **Love is the revelation of our deepest personal meaning, value, and identity.** But this revelation remains impossible as long as we are the prisoner of our own egoism. I cannot find myself in myself, but only in another. **My true meaning and worth are shown to me not in my estimate of myself, but in the eyes of the one who loves me; and that one must love me as I am, with my faults and limitations, revealing to me the truth that these faults and limitations cannot destroy my worth in their eyes; and that I am therefore valuable as a person in spite of my shortcomings, in spite of the imperfections of my exterior “package.”** **The package is totally unimportant. What matters is this infinitely precious message which I can discover only in my love for another person. And this message, this secret, is not fully revealed to me unless at the same time I am able to see and understand the mysterious and unique worth of the one I love...** Love, then, is a transforming power of almost mystical intensity which endows the lovers with qualities and capacities they never dreamed they could possess... **Love is not only a special way of being alive, it is the perfection of life. He who loves is more alive and more real than he was when he did not love.**

Love and Living pp. 27 – 28:

Whether or not you claim to be interested in it, from the moment you are alive you are bound to be concerned with love, because love is not just something that happens to you: it is a certain special way of being alive. Love is, in fact, an intensification of life, a completeness, a fullness, a wholeness of life. We do not live merely in order to vegetate through our days until we die. Nor do we live merely in order to take part in the routines of work and amusement around us... Life curves upward to a peak of intensity, a high point of value and meaning, at which all its latent creative possibilities go into action and the person transcends himself or herself in encounter, response and communion with another. It is for this that we came into the world – this communion and self-transcendence. **We do not become fully human until we give ourselves to each other in love.** And this must not be

confined only to sexual fulfillment: it embraces everything in the human person – the capacity for self-giving, for sharing, for creativity, for mutual care, for spiritual concern. Love is our true destiny. **We do not find the meaning of life by ourselves alone – we find it with another.** We do not discover the secret of our lives merely by study and calculation in our own isolated meditations. **The meaning of life is a secret that has to be revealed to us in love, by the one we love... We will never be fully real until we let ourselves fall in love – either with another human person or with God.** Hence our attitude toward life is going to be in one way or another an attitude toward love. Our conception of ourselves is bound to be profoundly affected by our conception – and our experience – of love. As our love, or our lack of it, our willingness to risk it or our determination to avoid it, will in the end be an expression of ourselves: of who we think we are, of what we want to be, of what we think we are here for.... **It transforms our entire life.**

Merton's Journey into Love (15)

Merton Chronology:

- Born in France during World War 1 on January 31 1915, parents were Artists (mother Ruth Jenkins was an American Quaker and father Owen Merton was an Anglican from New Zealand.)
- Lost his family throughout his early years
 - Mother dies from cancer when he was 6 (1921). She was distant and demanding on Tom even when she was alive.
 - Father dies from brain tumor when he was 16 (1931). Loved his father but he traveled extensively after his Mother died pursuing a living as an artist.
 - Maternal Grandfather dies in 1936 and Maternal Grandmother dies in 1937. Was very close to both.
 - Only Brother dies in World War II in 1943
 - His early childhood losses had a profound impact on his experience of love:
As an orphan, I went through the business of being passed from family to family, and being a “ward” and an “object of charitable concern,” etc. etc. **I know how inhuman and frustrating that can be – being treated as a thing and not as a person.** – The Hidden Ground of Love pg 605 (July 16, 1968).
 - His Friends, Teachers, Trappist Community, and the World became his family.

- Women were always a challenge, though he had a special devotion to the Virgin Mary, he didn't relate with women. He was popular and had lots of sexual encounters as a young man. It wasn't until age 51 (1966) and a monk that he briefly finds real love with a woman. It seems like both were deeply and genuinely in love with one another. Necessary to the full development of his capacity to love and to his human experience of loving and women.
- Lived in various places; little real stability – something I believe he was looking for his entire life. Locations include Long Island NY, France, London but traveled on small trips with this father, an Artist as was growing up.
 - In the fall of 1933, He entered Cambridge and had a miserable year, ignored his classes, drank excessively and hung out at public classes, spent way too much money, was very free sexually and probably fathered a child. Left Cambridge in Spring 1934
 - In May, Merton returned to live with his Grandparents in Long Island. Enrolled in Columbia University in January 1935 as a sophomore and his life began to, slowly, turn around.
 - Received B.A. in English in 1938 at Columbia and in 1939 he received his M.A. in literature.
- Finds Catholicism – and would remain firmly rooted in it throughout his life, he as a progressive with deep respect for continuity with the past (Pope John XXIII-style Catholic) but one who was always committed to understand and make his faith his own.
 - His reading turned more and more toward Catholicism (1937) and a pull toward God.
 - He started attending Church and then formally asked to become a Catholic at Corpus Christi church where he was baptized on November 16, 1938.
 - Felt a strong attraction to the Priesthood; applied but withdrew from the Franciscans in 1940.
 - In September 1940, Merton began to teach English at St. Bonaventure College in Olean NY and lead a personally devout life.
 - In April 1941 went to Our Lady of Gethsemani Monastery for a Holy Week Retreat, returned on December 10, 1941 and waited to be accepted into the Trappists
 - Obtains the habit of a choir-monk novice and given name of Mary Louis – February 21, 1941
 - Takes Simple vows – March 19, 1944
 - Finished the Seven Storey Mountain – October 1946 (age 31), published 1948
 - Pronounces Solemn vows – March 19, 1947
 - Ordained a priest on May 26, 1949 – a pinnacle experience

- Develops Faith through trials of uncertainty and questions
- Assigned responsibility for others – initially make his struggles deeper
 - Master of Scholastics (Students for the Priesthood): 1951 - 1955
 - Master of Novices: 1955 – 1965
- Emerged from his Dark Night period, continued to develop as a monk re-engaging with the World and with other Religions, seeks ever greater Solitude.
 - Became U.S. Citizen in 1951
 - Begins interest in the study of other Religions, especially interested in Zen in late 1950's
 - Outreach to other faiths – on the heels of Vatican Council II
 - Visits with Buddhists
 - Corresponds with and then visits D.T. Suzuki – Zen Scholar at Columbia
 - Vietnamese Buddhist monk Thich Nhat Hahn visits monastery and makes enormous impression on Merton (1966)
 - Experiences mystical “epiphany” at the corner of 4th and Walnut.
 - Increased interest in Racial Issues, Peace Movement, Opposition to Vietnam War and Nuclear Weapons.
 - Letters to and visits from countless activists
 - Disallowed to write about certain issues involving peace so wrote Cold War letters to friends instead.
 - Some of his public wanted him to “remain the writer of the Seven Storey Mountain.”
 - Deeply attracted to greater Solitude
 - Given use of wooden toolshed as a place of solitude – 1953
 - Moved into Hermitage – August 1965
 - Brief but intense romance with Marjorie, a 19-year old nurse in Louisville (1966)
- Final Pilgrimage to the Far East to attend first Asian East-West Intermonastic Conference in Bangkok
 - Leaves Abbey on 9/10/1968
 - Visits India, Sri-Lanka (Ceylon) and Thailand

- Visits Dalai Lama – 11/4/1968, 11/6/1968
 - Dalai Lama writes of Merton: I could see he was a truly humble and deeply spiritual man. This was the first time that I had been struck by such a feeling of spirituality in anyone who professed Christianity... It was Merton who introduced me to the real meaning of the word “Christian.”
- Mystical Experience at Polonnaruwa – December 4, 1968
- Addresses Intermonastic Conference and dies in Bangkok on 12/10/1968

Some of Merton’s formative experiences in his life as a monk:

He experienced the monastic journey as an unfolding into Love:

The Asian Journal of Thomas Merton – pg 333 – 334:

The whole purpose of the monastic life is to teach men to live by love. The simple formula, which was so simple in the West, was the Augustinian formula of the translation of cupiditas to caritas, of self-centered love into an outgoing, other-centered love. In the process of this change the individual ego was seen to be illusory and dissolved itself, and in place of this self-centered ego came the Christian person, who was no longer just the individual but was Christ dwelling in each one. So in each one of us the Christian person is that which is fully open to all other persons, because ultimately all other persons are Christ.

We are united in Christ, an important way of seeing the Unity of all Humanity:

New Seeds of Contemplation pp 292 – 296 (1961):

The Lord would not only love His creation as a Father, but He would enter into His creation, emptying Himself, hiding Himself, as if He were not God but a creature. ... For in becoming man, God became not only Jesus Christ but also potentially every man and woman that ever existed. In Christ, God became not only “this” man, but also, in a broader and more mystical sense, yet no less truly, “every man”. The presence of God in His world as its Creator depends on no one but Him. His presence in the world as Man depends, in some measure, upon men... we are able to decide whether we ourselves, and that portion of the world which is ours, shall become aware of His presence, consecrated by it, and transfigured in its light... It is possible to speak of the exterior self as a mask... The mask that each man wears may well be a disguise not only for man’s inner self but for God, wandering as a pilgrim and exile in His own creation. **And indeed, if Christ became Man, it is because He wanted to be any man**

and every man. If we believe in the Incarnation of the Son of God, there should be no one on earth in whom we are not prepared to see, in mystery, the presence of Christ.

His focus turned toward the World after this 4th and Walnut experience in Louisville (March 18, 1958) when he experienced the connectedness and love he had for everyone:

Fourth and Walnut experience: Conjectures of a Guilty Bystander pg 153 – 154 (1966)
an elaboration of an experience he had on March 18, 1958:

In Louisville, at the corner of Fourth and Walnut, in the center of the shopping district, I was suddenly overwhelmed with the realization that I loved all those people, that they were mine and I theirs, that we could not be alien to one another even though we were total strangers. It was like waking from a dream of separateness, of spurious self-isolation in a special world, the world of renunciation and supposed holiness. The whole illusion of a separate holy existence is a dream. Not that I question the reality of my vocation, or of my monastic life: but the conception of “separation from the world” that we have in the monastery too easily presents itself as a complete illusion: the illusion that by making vows we become a different species of being, pseudo-angels, “spiritual men,” men of interior life, what have you.

Certainly these traditional values are very real, but their reality is not of an order outside everyday existence in a contingent world, nor does it entitle one to despise the secular: though “out of the world,” **we are in the same world as everybody else, the world of the bomb, the world of race hatred, the world of technology, the world of mass media, big business, revolution, and all the rest. We take a different attitude to all these things, for we belong to God. Yet so does everybody else belong to God.** We just happen to be conscious of it, and to make a profession out of this consciousness. But does that entitle us to consider ourselves different, or even better, than others? The whole idea is preposterous.

This sense of liberation from an illusory difference was such a relief and such a joy to me that I almost laughed out loud. And I suppose my happiness could have taken form in the words: “Thank God, thank God that I am like other men, that I am only a man among others.” To think that for sixteen or seventeen years I have been taking seriously this pure illusion that is implicit in so much of our monastic thinking.

It is a glorious destiny to be a member of the human race, though it is a race dedicated to many absurdities and one which makes many terrible mistakes: yet, with all that, God Himself gloried in becoming a member of the human race. A member of the

human race! To think that such a commonplace realization should suddenly seem like news that one holds the winning ticket in a cosmic sweepstakes.

I have the immense joy of being man, a member of a race in which God Himself became incarnate. As if the sorrows and stupidities of the human condition could overwhelm me, now that I realize what we all are. And if only everybody could realize this! But it cannot be explained. There is no way of telling people that they are all walking around shining like the sun.

This changes nothing in the sense and value of my solitude, for it is in fact the function of solitude to make one realize such things with a clarity that would be impossible to anyone completely immersed in the other cares, the other illusions, and all the automatisms of a tightly collective existence. My solitude, however, is not my own, for I see now how much it belongs to them — and that I have a responsibility for it in their regard, not just in my own. It is because I am one with them that I owe it to them to be alone, and when I am alone, they are not “they” but my own self. There are no strangers!

Then it was as if I suddenly saw the secret beauty of their hearts, the depths of their hearts where neither sin nor desire nor self-knowledge can reach, the core of their reality, the person that each one is in God’s eyes. If only they could all see themselves as they really are. If only we could see each other that way all the time. There would be no more war, no more hatred, no more cruelty, no more greed...I suppose the big problem would be that we would fall down and worship each other. But this cannot be seen, only believed and “understood” by a peculiar gift.

... At the center of our being is a point of nothingness which is untouched by sin and by illusion, a point of pure truth, a point or spark which belongs entirely to God, which is never at our disposal, from which God disposes of our lives, which is inaccessible to the fantasies of our own mind or the brutalities of our own will. This little point of nothingness and of absolute poverty is the pure glory of God in us. It is so to speak His name written in us in our poverty, as our indigence, as our dependents, as our sonship. It is like a pure diamond, blazing with the invisible light of heaven. It is in everybody, and if we could see it we would see these billions of points of light coming together in the face and blaze of a sun that would make all the darkness and cruelty of life vanish completely... I have no program for this seeing. It is only given. But the gate of heaven is everywhere.

1958 was another important year for Merton, it seems like he finally began to accept himself:

Journal Entry October 2, 1958:

Finally I am coming to the conclusion that my highest ambition is to be what I already am. That I will never fulfill my obligation to surpass myself unless I first accept myself, and **if I accept myself fully in the right way, I will already have surpassed myself. For it is the unaccepted self that stands in my way and will continue to do so as long as it is not accepted.** When this has been accepted – it is my own stepping stone to what is above me. **Because this is the way man has been made by God. Original sin was the effort to surpass oneself by being “like God” – i.e. unlike oneself. But our Godlikeness begins at home. We must first become like ourselves and stop living “besides ourselves.”**

Saw love at the core of Ghandi’s non-violent activism:

Conjectures of a Guilty Bystander pp 81 – 82:

The tactic of nonviolence is a tactic of love, that seeks the salvation and redemption of the opponent, not his castigation, humiliation, and defeat. A pretended nonviolence that seeks to defeat and humiliate the adversary by spiritual instead of physical attack is little more than a confession of weakness. **True nonviolence** is totally different from this, and much more difficult. It **strives to operate without hatred, without hostility, and without resentment. It works without aggression, taking the side of the good that it is able to find already present in the adversary.**

Meeting with Thich Nhat Hanh proved that he could profoundly be connected with someone totally different than he was:

Faith and Violence Pg 106:

Nhat Hanh is My Brother... He is more my brother than many who are nearer to me by race and nationality, because he and I see things exactly the same way. (statements about Vietnam) **...I have far more in common with Naht Hahn than I have with many Americans, and I do not hesitate to say it. It is vitally important that such bonds be admitted. They are the bonds of a new solidarity and a new brotherhood** which is beginning to be evident on all the five continents and which cuts across all political, religious and cultural lines to unite young men and women in every country in something that is more concrete than an ideal and more alive than a program.

Confirmed by his trip to Asia:

Asian Journal, November Circular Letter to Friends – November 9, 1968 pg 324:

In summary, I can say so far my contacts with Asian monks have been very fruitful and rewarding. We seem to understand one another very well indeed.... They are all specialists in meditation and contemplation. This is what appeals to me most. It is invaluable to have direct contact with people who have really put in a lifetime of hard work in training their minds and liberating themselves from passion and illusion... **they are men of unusual quality and depth, very warm and wonderful people. Talking with them is a real pleasure...** I hope you will pray for me and for all those I will be meeting. I am sure the blessing of God will be upon these meetings, and I hope I can bring back to my monastery something of the Asian wisdom with which I am fortunate to be in contact – but it is something very hard to put into words. I wish you all the peace and joy in the Lord and an increase of faith: for **in my contacts with these new friends I also feel consolation in my own faith in Christ and His indwelling presence. I hope and believe He may be present in the hearts of all of us.** With my very best regards always, cordially yours in the Lord Jesus and in His Spirit.

Experienced the human love of a woman (1966):

Learning to Love May 9, 1966 pg 54:

There are in us both deep capacities for love... **I realize that the deepest capacities for human love in me have never even been tapped, that I too can love with an awful completeness. Responding to her has opened up the depths of my life in ways I can't bring to understand or analyze now. And of course there could be all kinds of "danger." ... I can't spell it out here. But all kinds of questions have obviously arisen. –**

Learning to Love, A Midsummer Diary for M. pg 336:

I have needed this love, and being without it is something I cannot yet grasp... Frankly, if things were not what they were, I can see that it would be terribly right and important for me to change everything and live the rest of my life with her.

Break (10)

Exploring various viewpoints on Love (55)

The Christian Call to Love – The Greatest Commandments (20)

Matthew 22: 35 – 40 (Douay-Rheims 1899 American Edition):

35 And one of them, a doctor of the law, asking him, tempting him: 36 Master, which is the greatest commandment in the law? 37 Jesus said to him: Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with thy whole heart, and with thy whole soul, and with thy whole mind. 38 This is the greatest and the first commandment. 39 **And the second is like to this:** Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. 40 **On these two commandments dependeth the whole law and the prophets.**

Luke 10:25-29 (Douay-Rheims 1899 American Edition):

25 And behold a certain lawyer stood up, tempting him, and saying, Master, **what must I do to possess eternal life?** 26 But he said to him: What is written in the law? how readest thou? 27 He answering, said: Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with thy whole heart, and with thy whole soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind: and thy neighbour as thyself. 28 And he said to him: Thou hast answered right: this do, and thou shalt live. 29 But he willing to justify himself, said to Jesus: **And who is my neighbour?**

John 13:34-35 (Douay-Rheims 1899 American Edition):

34 A new commandment I give unto you: **That you love one another, as I have loved you, that you also love one another.** 35 By this shall all men know that you are my disciples, if you have love one for another.

Life and Holiness – pg 115:

We love God with our whole heart and our whole mind and our whole soul and all our strength when all our thoughts, desires, and actions are directed at least virtually to him, and when we strive as far as possible to grow in the purity of our love and in the totality of our consecration. This implies sincere fidelity to one's obligations and generous response to all the demands of love in one's life. But beyond that it means a total faith in God and as far as possible complete abandonment to His merciful providence and love.

The New Man – pp 190 – 191:

We forget that He says “love one another as I have loved you”, and not *as you have loved me*. Our love, left to itself, is not very pure or very strong. To have strength, love must face realities. It must confront obstacles. It must accept difficulties. It must make sacrifices. It must be mature. Too often the love which we believe to be charity is merely an evasion of reality and responsibilities. It is the sentimental refuge to which we retire so as not to be bothered by the difficulties and hardships of life: a false sanctuary in which we are consoled by an imaginary Christ... The patience and kindness, the meekness and humility, the self-sacrifice and devotion which are contained in Christian charity and are necessary for its exercise, are not and can never be the signs of a spirit of weakness and compromise that seeks only to avoid difficulty and to preserve peace at any price. Nor is the patience of the charitable man merely a hidden weapon by which he shames and defeats his enemies. It is the strength which knows the difference between good and evil, and which knows how to overcome that difference by overcoming evil with good.

The Good Samaritan – A Thomas Merton Reader pp. 350 – 355:

“Who is my neighbor?” Christ told the parable of the Good Samaritan in answer to that question... (for) those who first heard the parable... all Samaritans were, by the very fact bad. Indeed that was why a Samaritan had to be the subject of the parable... Consider the question that was asked: “Who is my neighbor?” This was, in fact, the second question which a lawyer asked of Christ. His first,... was, “How shall I obtain eternal life?” This is an important question, and so important that nobody can be without the answer to it. Since the answer to the most important of questions is accessible to everyone, the lawyer should have known it. And he did know it. He had no need to ask it at all... it became clear that the question was not necessary. But in order to prove that he had a real problem, the lawyer asked again: “Who is my neighbor?” We can perhaps assume that he meant by this he had no problem loving God, since “God is good,” but that he was perplexed about loving his neighbor, since some men are better than others and all are imperfect. This being the case, in order to protect himself against loving an unworthy object and thus wasting his love, he wanted to know where to draw the line. Who is the neighbor to be loved, who is the alien not to be loved? The question is a matter of classification. Therefore it is a matter of judgement also, for to classify is to judge. How then does one classify people, and judge them accurately as worthy of love, or of hatred, or of indifference? This is a pretty question. But to the Lord it was a question that had no meaning, for He said, “Judge not, that ye be not judged.” Do not classify, and do not be classified. The Parable seems not to answer this question, or at least not answer it directly... Christ gives the example of one who needs love, and how passively receives love from someone who falls outside the category of “neighbor.”

And yet the Samaritan is constituted a “neighbor” by the fact that he gives love... the answer cuts right through the knot of the question. Christ does not tell the scribe how to judge and classify but teaches him that classifications are without significance in this matter of love. For we do not and cannot love according to classifications. Or if we do, then we do not love in the full sense of the word. Love is free; it does not depend on the desirability of its object, but loves for love’s sake. But if love submits itself to an object, to a good outside itself, it tends to its own destruction. If it confers good upon its object, then it thrives and grows. For the nature of love is to give as well as to receive. It both gives and receives, but it gives first, and in giving it receives. Therefore if love demands first of all to receive a good from its object, before beginning to love, then it can never begin to love. If a man had to be pleasing to be, comforting, reassuring, before I can love him, then I cannot truly love him... if he has to wear my kind of uniform, then my love is no longer love because it is not free: it is dictated by something outside myself. It is dominated by an appetite other than love. I love not the person but his classification, and in that event, I love him not as a person but as a thing. I love his label which confirms me in attachment to my own label. But in that case I do not even love myself. I value myself not for what I am, but for my label, my classification. In this way I remain at the mercy of forces outside myself, and those who seem to me to be neighbors are indeed strangers for I am first of all a stranger to myself. Do you think perhaps this is the meaning of the parable: that all men are to be loved because they are men? Because they are human, and have the same nature? No, this is not the meaning. This would be simply a matter of extending the classification to its broadest limits, and including all men in one big category, “Man.” Christ means more than this however... His answer is a divine revelation, not a natural ethical principle... if we get as close as we can to the source of revelation, we can gain deeper insights into the mystery...

The parable of the Good Samaritan is a revelation of God in a word that has great importance through all the Scriptures from the beginning to the end. It is a revelation of what the prophet Hosea says, speaking for the invisible God, “I will have *mercy* not sacrifices.” What is this *mercy* which we find spoken of everywhere in the Scriptures, and especially in the Psalms?... The Hebrew word which we render as mercy, says more still than mercy. *Chesed* (mercy) is also fidelity, it is also strength. It is the faithful, the indefectible mercy of God. It is ultimate and unfailing because it is the power that binds one person to another, in a covenant of hearts. It is the power that binds us to God because He has promised us mercy and will never fail in His promise. He cannot fail. It is the power and the mercy which are most characteristic of Him, which come nearer to the mystery into which we enter when all concepts darken and evade us... The *chesed* of God is a gratuitous mercy that considers no fitness, no worthiness, and no return. It is the way the Lord looks upon the guilty and with His look makes them at once innocent... in the depths of our own being there

is an inexhaustible spring of mercy and of love. Our own being has become love. Our own self has become God's love for us, and it is full of Christ, of *chesed*. But we must accept ourselves and others as *chesed*. We must be to ourselves and to others signs and sacraments of mercy... Who, then, is my neighbor? To whom am I bound? Who must I love? These are not intelligent questions, and they do not have clear answers... Love is not limited by classifications. The measure of love that Christ has set for us is beyond measure: we must "be perfect as the heavenly Father is perfect." But what is meant by the "perfection" of the heavenly Father? It is impartiality, not in the sense of justice that measures out equally to all knowing their merits, but in the sense of *chesed* that knows no classification of good and evil, just or unjust. "For He sends His ran upon the just and the unjust." ...

New Seeds of Contemplation – pg 75 – 77:

The root of Christian love is not the will to love, but *the faith that one is loved*. The faith that one is loved *by God*. That faith that one is loved by God although unworthy – or, rather, irrespective of one's worth! In the true Christian vision of God's love, the idea of worthiness loses significance. Revelation of the mercy of God makes the whole problem of worthiness something laughable: the discovery that worthiness is of no special consequence... is a true liberation of the spirit. And until this discovery is made, until this liberation has been brought about by the divine mercy, man is imprisoned in hate. Humanistic love will not serve. As long as we believe that we hate no one, that we are merciful, that we are kind by our very nature, we deceive ourselves; our hatred is merely smoldering under the grey ashes of complacent optimism. We are apparently at peace with everyone because we think we are worthy... But when we are delivered by the mercy of God the question no longer has a meaning. **Hatred tries to cure disunion by annihilating those who are not united with us. It seeks peace by the elimination of everybody else but ourselves. But love, by its acceptance of the pain of reunion, begins to heal all wounds. If you want to know what is meant by "God's will" in man's life, this is one way to get a good ideas of it. "God's will" is certainly found in anything that is required of us in order that we may be united with one another in love. You can call this, if you like, the basic tenant of the Natural Law, which is that we should treat others as we would like them to treat us, that we would not do to another what we would not want another to do to us... "In this shall all men know that you are my disciples – if you have love one for another."**

Love and Living pg 212:

The climate of mercy, which is the climate of the new creation, depends on the realization that all men are acceptable before God ... We ourselves are not entitled to be more demanding than God. Whoever is acceptable to Him is, therefore, acceptable to us, and this is the test of our faith and of our obedience to Him, that we become to some extent able to

be merciful to others as He has been merciful to us, knowing that this mercy is the cohesive power that establishes and manifests the Father's love in the living and unified Mystical Body of the Son.

New Seeds of Contemplation pg 65:

The more I become identified with God, the more will I be identified with all the others who are identified with Him. His Love will live in all of us. His Spirit will be our One Live, the Life of all of us and Life of God. And we shall love one another and God with the same Love with which He loves us and Himself. The love is God Himself. Christ prayed that all men might become One as He is One with His Father, in the Unity of the Holy Spirit. **Therefore when you and I become what we are really meant to be, we will discover not only that we love one another perfectly but that we are both living in Christ and Christ in us, and we are all One Christ. We will see that it is He Who loves in us. The ultimate perfection of the contemplative life** is not a heaven of separate individuals, each one viewing his own private intuition of God; it is a sea of Love which flows through the One Body... **I will have more joy in heaven and in the contemplation of God, if you are also there to share it with me; and the more of us there will be to share it the greater will be the joy of all.**

[The Call to Human Love \(10\)](#)

No Man Is an Island pp xx-xxi:

We do not exist for ourselves alone, and it is only when we are fully convinced of this fact that we begin to love ourselves properly and thus also love others. What do I mean by loving ourselves properly? I mean, first of all, desiring to live, accepting life as a very great gift and a great good, not because of what it gives us, but because of what it enables us to give others. The modern world is beginning to discover, more and more, that the quality and vitality of man's life depend on his own secret will to go on living. **There is a dark force for destruction within us, which someone has called the "death instinct." It is a terribly powerful thing, this force generates by our own frustrated self-love battling with itself. It is the power of a self-love that has turned into self-hatred and which, in adoring itself, adores the monster by which it is consumed. It is therefore of supreme importance that we consent to live not for ourselves but for others. When we do this we will be able first of all to face and accept our own limitations. As long as we secretly adore ourselves, our own deficiencies will remain to torture us with an apparent defilement. But if we live for others, we will gradually discover that no one expects us to be "as gods." We will see that we are human, like everyone else, that we all have weaknesses and deficiencies, and that these limitations of ours play a most important part in all our lives. It is because of them that we need others and others need us. We are not all weak in the same spots, and so we supplement and**

complete one another, each one making up in himself for the lack in another. Only when we see ourselves in our true human context, as members of a race which is intended to be one organism and “one body,” will we begin to understand the positive importance not only of the success but of the failures and the accidents in our lives.

The New Man pp 90 – 91:

In order to be fully himself, man needs to love another as himself. In order to realize himself, man has to risk diminution and even the total loss of all his reality, in favor of another... We are never truly ourselves until we realize that those we truly love become our “other selves.” Seeing this, we are capable of beginning to grasp that God also loves us at He loves Himself. Without this awareness, there can be no perfect communion. In the mystery of social love there is found the realization of “the other” not only as one to be loved by us, so that we may perfect ourselves, but also as one who can become more perfect by loving us. The vocation to charity is a call not only to love but be loved. **The man who does not care at all whether or not he is loved is ultimately unconcerned about the true welfare of the other and of society. Hence we cannot love unless we also consent to be loved in return.** The life of “the other” is not only a supplement, an adjunct to our own. Our companion is our helper and it is in helping one another that we give glory to God. **What is seen singly and indivisibly in His one nature and Three Persons, should be seen refracted and multiplied in the many subsisting natures of men united with one another in society.**

No Man is an Island pg 244:

Charity is a love for God which respects the need that other men have for Him. Therefore, charity alone can give us the power and the delicacy to love others without defiling their loneliness which is their need and their salvation. Do not stress too much the fact that love seeks to penetrate the intimate secrets of the beloved. Those who are too fond of this idea fall short of true love, because they violate the solitude of those they love, instead of respecting it. **True love penetrates the secrets and the solitude of the beloved by allowing him to keep his secrets to himself and to remain in his own solitude.**

Learning to Love, A Midsummer Diary for M. pg 307:

The sense that love makes, and I think the only sense it makes, is the beloved. The discovery, the revelation of the absolute value of the one loved. This is not so much a discovery of meaning as a discovery of goodness. To think of love as an answer or a “solution” is to evade the stark directness of this discovery. **The fact that you are you is something of absolute**

value to me... The fact that you are: that you are you. This is all I have left. But **it is the whole of love.** And nothing can change it.

The (Christian) Call to Love in Society – Social Justice and Action. (15)

Life and Holiness – pp 88-90:

Too often Christian charity is understood in an entirely superficial way, as though it were no more than gentleness, kindness, and affability. It certainly includes all these things, but it goes far beyond them. **When charity is regarded as merely “being nice to” other people, this is generally because our outlook is narrow and takes in only our immediate neighbors, who share the same advantages and comforts as we.** This conception tacitly excludes those who most need our love – those who are unfortunate, who suffer, who are poor, destitute, or who have nothing in the world and who therefore have a claim upon everyone else who has more than he himself strictly needs. **There is no charity without justice.** Too often we think of charity as a kind of moral luxury, as something which we choose to practice and which gives us merit in God’s sight, at the same time satisfying a certain interior need to “do good.” Such charity is immature and even in some cases completely unreal. **True charity is love, and love implies deep concern for the needs of another. It is not a matter of moral self-indulgence, but of strict obligation...** The sacrifice must be real, not just a gesture of lordly paternalism which inflates his own ego while patronizing “the poor.” ... **We must give not only our possessions but ourselves to our brothers.**

Love and Living pg 149 – 150:

The center of Christian Humanism is the idea that God is love, not infinite power. Being Love, God has given himself without reservation to man so that He has become man. Henceforth, by reason of the Incarnation, the love which is also the infinite creative secret of God in his hidden mystery becomes manifest and active, through man, in man’s world. It is man, in Christ, who has the mission of not only making himself human but of becoming divine by the gift of the Spirit of Love. This is not an abstract or contemplative operation only. **Love is measured by its activity and its transforming power. Christianity does not teach man to attain an inner ideal of divine tranquility and stoic quite by abstracting himself from material things. It teaches him to give himself to his brother and to his world in a service of love in which God will manifest his creative power through men on earth.**

Faith and Violence, pg 14:

Non-violence is perhaps the most exacting of all forms of struggle, not only because it demands first of all that one be ready to suffer evil and even face the threat of death

without violent retaliation, but because it excludes mere transient self-interest, even political, from its considerations. In a very real sense, he who practices non-violent resistance must commit himself not to the defense of his own interests or even those of a particular group: **he must commit himself to the defense of objective truth and right and above all man... Christian non-violence is not built on a presupposed division, but on the basic unity of man. It is not out for the conversion of the wicked to the ideas of the good, but for the healing and reconciliation of man with himself, man the person and man the human family...** For the Christian, the basis of non-violence is the Gospel message of salvation for all men and of the Kingdom of God to which all are summoned. The disciple of Christ... proves his faith by the gift of his whole self to the Lord in order that all may enter the Kingdom... The great historical event, the coming of the Kingdom is made clear and is “realized” in proportion as Christians themselves live the life of the Kingdom in circumstances of their own place and time. **By their example of a truly Christian understanding of the world, expressed in a living and active application of the Christian faith to the human problems of their own time. Christians manifest the love of Christ for men (Jn 13:35, 17:21), and by that fact make him visibly present in the world.**

[Love Binds Everyone together \(10\)](#)

Conjectures of a Gully Bystander pp 329 – 330:

The most valid intuition of the “religionless religion” people is, I think, their awareness that , **though the vast majority of men today cannot adjust themselves to the idea that life acquires meaning only when one “joins the Church.” These men who “cannot believe” are nevertheless, somehow mysteriously, encountering Christ.** It is not the Christ of theology, ... devotion and art, ... “Christian civilization,” literature, ethics, philosophy. **It is an anonymous and unknown Christ who come in merciful hiddenness to the distraught pilgrim, as He did to the travelers to Emmaus... I honestly think that there *is* a presence of Christ to the unbeliever, especially in our day, and that this presence, which is not formally “religious” and which escapes definition *is perhaps the deepest most cogent mystery of our time.*** The thing that Christians must understand about this is that there is no use whatever trying to “get these people into the Church” or to make “believers” out of them... **What is needed is to love them with a love completely divested of all formally religious presuppositions, simply as our fellow men, men who seek truth and freedom as we do. This love is not simply an act of benevolent, condescending and tolerant charity on our part. It can also be a means of knowing Christ better, by entering into the mystery of the hidden encounter which marks the lives of these others in a way that neither they nor we can understand. We cannot understand it, but by means of love we can experience its reality, nevertheless.**

Zen and the Birds of Appetite, pg 129:

The man who has truly found his spiritual nakedness , who has realized he is empty, is not a self that has *acquired* emptiness or *become* empty. He just “is empty from the beginning,” ... he “**loves with a pure love.**” That is to say he loves with a purity and freedom that spring spontaneously and directly from the fact that he has fully recovered the divine likeness, and is now fully his true self because he is lost in God... All he know is love. –

The Asian Journal of Thomas Merton, Opening Remarks to a Special Closing Prayer at the First InterSpiritual Summit Conference in Calcutta, India pg 318:

... we realize that we are going to have to create a new language of prayer. **And this new language of prayer has to come out of something that transcends all our traditions, and comes out of the immediacy of love... The thing that are on the surface are nothing, whet is deep is the Real. We are creatures of love...**

[Conclusion and Prayer \(15\)](#)

[Revisiting What Love is \(5\)](#)

[Was there anything new you take away from this \(why are you here\)? \(10\)](#)

[What most touched you about today?](#)

[What new or different realizations do you have after today, or what was reinforced?](#)

[What will you do differently as a result?](#)

Departing Prayer

“O God, we are one with You. You have made us one with You. You have taught us that if we are open to one another, You dwell in us. Help us to preserve this openness and to fight for it with all our hearts. Help us to realize that there can be no understanding where there is mutual rejection. O God, in accepting one another wholeheartedly, fully, completely, we accept You, and we thank You, and we adore You, and we love You with our whole being, because our being is Your being, our spirit is rooted in Your spirit. Fill us then with love, and let us be bound together with love as we go our diverse ways, united in this one spirit which makes You present in the world, and which makes You witness to the ultimate reality that is love. Love has overcome. Love is victorious. Amen.” – Closing statements and prayer from an informal address delivered in Calcutta, India (October 1968)

Appendix – extra Merton passages

The Christian Call to Love – The Greatest Commandments

The Law of Love – Conjectures of a Guilty Bystander pp 116-118:

The Law of Love. We will speak of the Law of Love. The first and greatest commandment. And the second like unto the first. What is the Law of Love? We tend to think of it as a dictate which interferes with our ordinary, natural, human existence. The interference is of course salutary, indeed, “salvific.” ... **Yet the “Law of Love” (supernatural) tends to break into the Law of Nature, which we assume is contrary to it.** With a sigh we renounce that to which we are spontaneously inclined and turn away to “duty” – **the duty of love, imposed for some inscrutable reason by God in order to “save us.”** ... Let us... try to understand the Christian view of love. **First of all, the Law of Love is the deepest law of our nature, not something extraneous and alien to our nature.** Our nature inclines us to love, and to love freely... **we should reach our fulfillment by loving... we have to act as persons – freely!** As soon as we come into existence, we begin to obey the Law of Love. **The demands of the Law of Love are progressive. We begin by loving life itself, by loving survival at any price. Hence, we must first love ourselves. But as we grow, we must love others. We must love them as our own fulfillment. Then we must come to love them in order to fulfill them, to develop their capacity to love, and finally we must love others and ourselves in and for God. But the most fundamental demand of the Law of Love is that we should love *freely*.** ... Our choice is limited to certain definite possibilities. But, still, **we can and must choose to love the men we actually encounter, whether as friends or as men loved in spite of their hostility... It is a command to commit ourselves to the use of this deep power that is in us, to choose to commit ourselves even in situations where the power does not go into action instinctively. In a word, the command to love is a command to rise above the mechanisms of natural instinct, to use a natural force freely and**

deliberately, instead of permitting ourselves to be led by it, and carried away by it blindly. Only this free use elevates the natural drive to a personal and spiritual level.

Love and Living pg 204:

We are “perfect as our heavenly Father is perfect,” in proportion as our love is no longer restricted by a “law” or a “measure” of recognizable self-interest. If we love others only insofar as they love us, we are confined within an iron law of selfhood which seeks to assert our own existence and defend it...The love we thus give to others is the reward we offer them, the payment with which we buy their recognition of our own existence. With such love we only bribe them to help us persist in an illusion of a deathless and complete autonomy. And we bribe them by helping them defend the same illusion in themselves. But the Father makes His sun rise on the evil and the good, and our love, if we are sons of God, must not be limited to friends and to show who favor us or give us joy. Christian mercy falls like rain on the just and the unjust and has no law but sonship, likeness to the “perfect” Father... To receive mercy and to give it is, then to participate, as son of the Father, in the work of the new creation and of redemption.

New Seeds of Contemplation pp 68 – 69:

The One God Who exists only in Three Persons is a circle of relations in which His infinite reality, Love, is ever identical and ever renewed, always perfect and always total, always beginning and never ending, absolute, everlasting and full... It is because the Love of God does not terminate in one self-sufficient self that is capable of halting and absorbing it, that the Life and Happiness of God are absolutely infinite and perfect and inexhaustible. Therefore in God there can be no selfishness, because the Three Selves of God are Three subsistent relations of selflessness, overflowing and superabounding in joy in the Gift of their One Life. The interior life of God is perfect contemplation. Our joy and our life are destined to be nothing but a participation in the Love that is theirs. In Them we will one day live entirely in God and in one another as the Persons of God live in One another.

[The Call to Human Love](#)

Love and Living, Seven Words, Purity pp 118- 119:

Properly understood sexual union is an expression of deep personal love and a means to the deepening, perfecting, and sanctifying of that love. To seek sexual gratification as an end in itself and without due regard for the needs of one’s partner would make this true purity of love almost impossible. Therefore, it is immediately apparent that the notion of purity in love can be fully guaranteed only by a maturely developed sense of personal sacrifice for the good of the other and in order to meet the deepest and most challenging demands of the situation. Here the purity of love will be discovered not by the mechanical application of merely external norms but a wise and even inspired integration of personal freedom and objective demands, so that the act of love will flower into a more fruitful and creative expression of life and truth... That act will be pure which is all its aspects can be said to respect the truth and integrity, the true needs and the deepest good of those who share it together, as well as the objective demands of other, of society and so on. By this standard, certain casuistical interpretations which would permit an unhealthy and truncated sexual

activity as still legally “pure” will be seen as an affront to the authentic wholeness and purity of man. Others which might from a certain point of view shock and scandalize conventional minds may nevertheless meet a profoundly authentic and spiritual demand for inner purity and wholeness... **(The) concept of purity is, therefore, not one in which two people seek to love each other in spirit and truth in spite of their bodies, but, on the contrary, use all the resources of body, mind, heart, imagination, emotion, and will in order to celebrate love that has been given them by God, and in so doing to praise Him!**

[The \(Christian\) Call to Love in Society – Social Justice and Action.](#)

Faith and Violence – pp 8 – 9:

“Love” is unfortunately a much misused word. It trips easily off the Christian tongue...**A theology of love cannot afford to be too sentimental. It cannot afford to preach edifying generalities about charity, while identifying “peace” with mere established power and legalized violence against the oppressed. A theology of love cannot be allowed merely to serve the interest of the rich and powerful... The theology of love must seek to deal realistically with the evil and injustice in the world, and not merely compromise with them.** Such a theology will have to take not of the ambiguous realities of politics, without embracing the specious myth of a “realism” that merely justifies force in the service of established power. Theology does not exist merely to appease the already too untroubled conscience of the powerful and the established. **A theology of love may also conceivably turn out to be a theology of revolution. In any case, it is a theology of resistance, a refusal of the evil that reduces a brother to homicidal desperation.**

Seeds of Destruction - A Tribute to Gandhi: pp 225 – 234:

Gandhi certainly spoke often of Jesus, whom he had learned to know through Tolstoy. And Gandhi knew the New Testament thoroughly. Whether or not Gandhi “believed in” Jesus in the sense that he had genuine Christian faith in the Gospel would be very difficult to demonstrate, and it is not my business to prove it or disprove it. I think the effort to do so would be irrelevant in any case. **What is certainly true is that Gandhi not only understood the ethic of the Gospel as well, if not in some ways better than many Christians, but he is one of the very few men of our time who applied Gospel principles to the problems of a political and social existence in such a way that his approach to these problems was inseparably religious and political at the same time...** For Gandhi, strange as it may seem to us, political action had to be by its very nature “religious” in the sense that it had to be informed by principles of religious and philosophical wisdom. **To separate religion and politics was in Gandhi’s eyes “madness” because his politics rested on a thoroughly religious interpretation of reality, of life, and of man’ place in the world. Gandhi’s whole concept of man’s relations to his own inner being and to the world of objects around him was informed by the contemplative heritage of Hinduism, together with the principles of Karma Yoga which blended in his thought, with the ethic of the Synoptic Gospels and the Sermon on the Mount. In such a view, politics had to be understood in the context of service and worship in the ancient sense of ... (liturgy, public work).**

Man's intervention in the active life of society was at the same time by its very nature... his own personal service (of God and man) and worship... **Political action was ... a means of witnessing to the truth and the reality of the cosmic structure by making one's own proper contribution to the order willed by God. One could thus preserve one's integrity and peace, being detached from results (which were in the hands of God) and being free from the inner violence that comes from division and untruth... Gandhi emphasized the importance of the individual person entering political action with a fully awakened and operative spiritual power in himself, the power of Satyagraha, non-violent dedication to truth, a religious and spiritual force, a wisdom born of fasting and prayer. This is the charismatic and personal force of the saints... Gandhi remains in our time as a sign of the genuine union of spiritual fervor and social action... Gandhi's religio-political action was based on an ancient metaphysic of man, a philosophical wisdom which is common to Hinduism, Buddhism, Islam, Judaism, and Christianity: that "truth is the inner law of our being."** ... Gandhi's religious action is based on a religious intuition of being in man and in the world, and his vow of truth is a vow of fidelity to being in all its accessible dimensions. His wisdom is based on experience more than on logic. **Hence the way of peace is the way of truth, of fidelity to wholeness and being, which implies a basic respect for life not as a concept, not as a sentimental figment of the imagination, but in its deepest most secret and most fontal reality. The first and fundamental truth is to be sought in respect for our own inmost being,** and this in turn implies the recollectedness and the awareness which attune us to that silence in which alone Being speaks to us in all its simplicity... Therefore he fasted, observed days of silence, lived frequently in retreat, knew the value of solitude, as well as the totally generous expenditure of his time and energy in listening to others and communicating with them... **"Jesus died in vain," said Gandhi, "if he did not teach us to regulate the whole of life by the eternal law of love."**... Gandhi believed that the central problem of our time was the rejection of a basic law of love and truth which had been made known to the world in traditional religions and most clearly by Jesus Christ. Gandhi himself expressly and very clearly declared himself an adherent of this one law. His whole life, his political action, finally even his death, were nothing but a witness to his commitment. **"IF LOVE IS NOT THE LAW OF OUR BEING THE WHOLE OF MY ARGUMENT FALLS TO PIECES."**... It is true that Gandhi expressly disassociated himself from Christianity in any of its visible and institutional forms. But it is also true **he built his whole life and all his activity upon what he conceived to be the law of Christ. In fact, he died for this law which was at the heart of his belief... A Christian can do nothing greater that follow his own conscience with a fidelity comparable to that which Gandhi obeyed what he believed to be the voice of God.**

[Love Binds Everyone together](#)

The Hidden Ground of Love – pp 115 – 116:

... something that I see to be most precious – and most available too. **The reality that is present to us and in us: call it Being, call it Atman, call it Pneuma ... or Silence. And the simple fact that by being attentive, by learning to listen (or recovering the natural capacity to listen which cannot be learned any more than breathing), we can find ourselves engulfed in such happiness that it cannot be explained the happiness of being at one with everything in that hidden ground of Love for which**

there can be no explanations. I suppose what makes me most glad is that we all recognize each other in this metaphysical space of silence and happiness and get some sense, for a moment, that we are full of paradise without knowing it.

Asian Journal, October 23, 1968 talk at Calcutta Interreligious conference - pg 306:

The only ultimate reality is God. God lives and dwells in us. We are not justified by any action of our own, but we are called by the voice of God...to pierce through the irrelevance of our own life, while accepting that our life is totally irrelevant in order to find relevance in Him. And this relevance in Him is something that can only be received, not something we grasp or possess. It is something that can only be received as a gift. Consequently, the kind of life that I represent is a life that is openness to gift; a gift from God and a gift from others. **It is not that we go out into the world with a capacity to love others greatly. This too we know in ourselves, that our capacity for love is limited. And it has to be completed with the capacity to be loved, to accept love from others, to want to be loved by others, to admit our loneliness and to live with our loneliness because everybody is lonely.** This is then another basis for the kind of experience I am talking about, which is a new approach, a different approach to the external experience of the monk. The monk in this solitude and in his meditation seeks this dimension of life. .. **And the deepest level of communication is not communication, but communion. It is wordless. It is beyond words, and it is beyond speech, and it is beyond concept. Not that we discover a new unity. We discover an older unity. My dear brothers, we are already one. But we imagine that we are not. And what we have to recover is our original unity. What we have to be is what we are.**