

Towards a New Monastic Theology

“By our fidelity we must build—starting with the most natural territory of our own self—a work, an opus, into which something enters from all the elements of the earth. We make our own soul throughout all our earthly days; and at the same time we collaborate in another work, in another opus, which infinitely transcends, while at the same time it narrowly determines, the perspectives of our individual achievement: the completing of the world.”¹

—Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, *The Divine Milieu*

Let us begin with a brief editorial note: Traditionally “monk” or “monastic” can be used to refer to both men and women contemplatives, and I use it throughout in a gender-neutral sense. It is important to keep in mind as we journey that our epistemological, ontological, etc. descriptions can be seen more as narrative orientations than absolutes. That is to say, they orient us towards specific existential experiences that are played out in the praxis of our lives—and we should pragmatically critique and reflect on these orientations, testing them in the crucible of our souls, and allow them to develop as we are informed by life experience and the experiences of others.

In the following essay we will take a brief look at “new monasticism” and survey some elements that may prove fruitful for a “new monastic theology.” New monasticism, with its own ethos and orientation, stands at a crossroads of contemplative and prophetic traditions, social theory and emergent understandings of religiosity. It has rapport with numerous modern movements in academia and beyond: John Thatamanil’s “dynamic nondualism” and search for a “process Tilichianism,” Wesley Wildman’s epistemological and methodological development of a “religious philosophy” for philosophy of religion, Robert Neville’s systematic, multicultural and interreligious “Philosophic Theology,” process theology and theopoetics, “multiple-belonging,” a post-postmodern “religious turn” in Continental philosophy and “contemplative turn” in theology, comparative theology, Jorge Ferrer and Jacob Sherman’s “participatory turn” in religious studies, Cornel West’s deep exploration of democracy and Chekhovian Christian sense of the tragicomic, feminist and gender studies in theology, philosophy and social theory, liberation theology, social justice oriented economic and political theory, and a re-appreciation of the aesthetic dimension of life. The contemplative traditions hold a special significance for new monastic life, as a collective inheritance into the process of spiritual maturation. In *The New Monasticism: An Interspiritual Manifesto for Contemplative Living* (w/ Adam Bucko; Forthcoming, Orbis Books, April 2015), we lay out the

beginnings of a theological, philosophical and contemplative understanding to its underpinnings, as well as concrete methodologies and injunctions for its praxis.

A Brief Introduction to New Monasticism

In the book we trace Raimon Panikkar's thesis of the "archetype of the monk" and its evolution into a form of the 'new monk:' "The new monk is an ideal, an aspiration that lives in the minds and hearts of our contemporary generation."² Panikkar held doctorates in philosophy, chemistry, and theology, spoke eleven languages, and wrote in six of them. A Catholic priest who once famously remarked, "I 'left' as a Christian, 'found' myself a Hindu and 'return' a Buddhist, without having ceased to be a Christian," it is hard to find another person who was able to immerse himself so completely in such diverse cultural milieus.³

In *Blessed Simplicity: The Monk as Universal Archetype*, an outgrowth of a symposium between monastics from East and West and non-monastic contemplatives, Panikkar puts forward the thesis that the monk represents a constitutive dimension of the human being, which he dubs *the archetype of the monk*:

an archetype [is] a product of human life itself [and is therefore] mutable and dynamic. ... To speak of *the archetype of the monk* ... assumes that there is a *human* archetype which the monk works out with greater or lesser success. Traditional monks may have reenacted in their own way 'something' that we too may be called upon to realize, but in a different manner.

...

[The traditional monk is] only one way of realizing [this] universal archetype. ... If the monastic dimension exists at least potentially in everybody, the institution of monasticism should be equally open to everybody. ... The monastery, then, would not be the 'establishment' of the monks, but the *schola Domini*, the school where that human dimension is cultivated and transmitted. ... Here appears the consequence of our distinction between the *monk* as archetype, i.e., the monk as a paradigm of religious life, against the *archetype* of the monk, i.e., the human archetype lived out by the monks, but which may also be experienced and lived today in different ways.⁴

Traditionally the monastic life stressed the primacy of being *over* doing, while the new monk "stresses the unity of being and doing ... true action is contemplative and authentic contemplation acts."⁵ The goal and struggle—or perhaps it is the play—of the new monk is to incarnate the fact that spiritual and contemplative life includes action. In fact, action can become contemplation, and contemplation becomes action. The new monk works toward a new way of being in the world where one becomes an expression of Spirit, a form through which God can live and work in the

world, an empty vessel through which the Buddha-mind manifests. St. Theresa of Avila captures this need for contemplative-action in Christian terms:

*Christ has no body but yours,
No hands, no feet on earth but yours,
Yours are the eyes with which he looks with Compassion on this world,
Yours are the feet with which he walks to do good,
Yours are the hands, with which he blesses all the world.
Yours are the hands, yours are the feet,
Yours are the eyes, you are his body.⁶*

Another intuition of the new monastic is what Raimon Panikkar called “the holiness of the secular.” By *secular*, we refer not only to a radical and peculiar independence from any *particular* religious institution, but also, and mysteriously, to an independence from a purely eternal and immutable “nature of things.” In other words, by the *holiness of the secular* we mean the holiness of all that exists in *this* world. Panikkar describes the secular as the “temporal character of things,” and goes on to explain this intuition: “This temporality is now being taken not only as something that matters, but as something definitive. Instead of being just fleeting, passing, ephemeral, the temporal structure of the world now represents a coefficient of reality that cannot be eliminated ... [it] is no longer considered something you can dispense with, or even utilize in order to reach something more important.”⁷ Therefore the new monastic:

tends towards the secular, without thereby diminishing his [or her] pursuit of holiness. ... Secularity represents the affirmation that the body, history, the material world and all temporal values in general are definitive and insuperable. ... [T]hat it is legitimate to be involved in temporal affairs, that time has a positive value, and that the religious person must occupy himself [or herself] with reforming the very socio-political-historical structures of reality. ... It means the incorporation of the divine in the human and its impregnation of all the structures of the material world. ... If this represents a mutation in the conception of the holy, it equally signifies a parallel revolution in the experience of the secular. The secular is no longer that which is fleeting, provisional, perishable, contingent, and so forth, but is rather the very clothing of the permanent, the eternal, the immutable.⁸

This orientation is also intuited in the sophianic tradition of Russian Orthodox theology, most often associated with Vladimir Soloviev, Sergi Bulgakov and Nikolas Berdyaev, as they struggled to understand how the Orthodox tradition can and should engage with the modern world. They related the process of “theosis” (the “divinization” of the human being) with the concept of the “humanity of God,” eventually concluding that God’s Wisdom, *Sophia*, was active in all spheres of life, including secular pursuits and even other religious traditions. The traditions founder for all

intensive purposes was Soloviev. Paul Valliere, in *Modern Russian Theology*, describes Soloviev's thought as concerns other religions:

If the evolution of religion is a divine-human process, every stage must embody the humanity of God to some extent. Does this mean that all religions are in some sense true? Soloviev says yes, '...not one of the moments of the religious process, can be in itself a lie or delusion. ... [T]he working assumption of Soloviev's theory of religious evolution is that every positive religious claim contains a measure of divine truth.'⁹

The sophiological tradition also affirms that spiritual maturity and growth occurs *within* the world, and not just through leaving the world behind. In this, it *democratized* the Orthodox concept of theosis:

While Soloviev affirms the Orthodox doctrine of theosis, he also broadens it. The traditional doctrine, formulated almost exclusively by monks, is an ascetical theory which envisions the image of God stripping itself bare of worldly attachments ... For Soloviev human beings are divinizable not just as primordial image but as creative agents engaged in the pursuits that fulfill humanity in the flesh, such as politics, science, education, the arts, technology and so on. ... [T]he humanity of God has the power to divinize human 'wisdom,' i.e. culture, and in this capacity is appropriately called Sophia. The name fits the function."¹⁰

Theologian Christopher Pramuk in his recent book, *Sophia: The Hidden Christ of Thomas Merton*, argues that the breakthrough of Sophia into Merton's consciousness throughout the years 1957-1961 proved a pivotal movement in Merton's life, setting the stage for his final years and the intensely engaged, prophetic mysticism that comes out of his later writing. "It was *Sophia*, the 'unknown and unseen Christ' within all things, who both centered and in many respects catalyzed Merton's theological imagination in a period of tremendous social, political, and religious fragmentation."¹¹ He goes on to explain the sophiological tradition as it manifested in Merton's thought and theology:

the sophiological tradition implies not the embrace of an elaborate theology so much as a way of life: a commitment to prayer, community, simplicity, solitude, artistic and vocational creativity, ascetism—all tested means ... for cultivating a wider love in relation to the world, or what monastic spirituality calls purity of heart, poverty of spirit.¹²

...

[S]ophiology 'is oriented to the actual world [which] is always under construction ...' In its open engagement with the natural and human sciences, the sophiological tradition, as Rowan Williams observes, 'dissolves crude oppositions between spirit and body, and allows us to imagine a world that is not only self-aware but *sensually* aware of itself ... [it] sees the basis of ethics in the call to active co-operation with the sophianic transfiguration of the world

... [a world] in which the characteristic *human* business is the transforming of an environment.¹³

...

When we attend to her tender voice and give our quiet consent, she [*Sophia*] effects in us a work greater than that of Creation: the work of new being in grace, the work of mercy and peace, justice and love ... The remembrance of Sophia opens onto a mystical political spirituality of engagement with the world.¹⁴

We use the term “monastic” then, to represent a level of commitment to the “transformative journey,” a journey which allows increasing degrees of love, compassion, joy, sorrow, and wisdom to flourish within us and within our actions in the world. The *monastic* is the one who devotes his or her life to this ideal, and allows all one’s life decisions to flow out of this commitment. The root of the word “monk” is *monachos*, which means “to set oneself apart.” For us, this is not so much a physical separation as a setting oneself apart from one’s cultural conditioning—from an unquestioning, and *un-questing*, view of life—one that drives us to adulate material success, seduces us into participating in the devastation of our planet, hardens our hearts to the plight of the poor and oppressed, and divorces us from our innate capacity for spiritual growth and maturity.

By *New*, we refer to the phenomenon of this spiritual vocation being lived out “in the world.” This can mean many things, but we refer specifically to a passionate embrace of the transformation of our societal, political, economic and religious structures to provide the proper milieu for human flourishing, reflecting the deepest qualities of the human heart and the divine dignity of each human being. Therefore one’s spiritual journey, at its very root, is consciously bound to the day-to-day reality of most people’s lives—with the hardship of financial realities, the ups and downs of political unrest, the blessings and difficulties of relationships—all in the midst of a contemporary society that does not support such a calling. It adds a level of complexity to the “monastic vocation,” perhaps many levels. Yet those who feel called could never do otherwise, for in the depths of one’s soul it is known that our journey to wholeness lies in bringing forth the radical profundity and divine, transformative energy of our paths firmly into the world.

Towards a New Monastic Theology

We now turn to what is more a tentative exploration than a developed articulation, perhaps even the beginnings of a grand adventure, if I may be so bold. A new monastic theo-logy, or “discourse on the Divine,” must be *contemplative*, *prophetic*, *interspiritual*, and *pragmatic*, with this latter

being in some sense an underground stream flowing throughout. We will take a look at each of these, punctuated by the examples of Martin Luther King, Jr. and Howard Thurman, and then close with an ever so brief survey of a possible philosophical grounding to our theological “adventure.”

By *contemplative*, I mean to refer to a personal, transformative process of maturation, one resulting in expanded expressions of love, wisdom, and compassion.¹⁵ Such a process has been attested to by human beings in essentially all cultural and religious milieus throughout human history, whether ancient Greece (Socrates and Plato), 7th and 8th century India (Chandrakirti and Sankara), 13th century Persia (Jalal al-Din Muhammad Rumi), 15th century Spain (St. John of the Cross and St. Teresa of Avila), or 18th century Ukraine (Rabbi Yisroel ben Eliezer, commonly known as the Baal Shem Tov), to name but a handful of testaments to this transformative potential of the human being.

By *prophetic*, we refer to our “passionate embrace” of the world. This includes within it the naming of individual acts and structural evils in the world, as well as theoretical and practical work for its transformation. In his classic work *The Prophets*, Abraham Joshua Heschel endeavors to give us a taste of the existential “prophetic” experience of the Judaic prophets of old. “The prophet is a man who feels fiercely,” while “Prophecy is the voice that God has lent to the silent agony, a voice to the plundered poor, to the profaned riches of the world. It is a form of living, a crossing point of God and man. . . . To the prophet . . . no subject is as worthy of consideration as the plight of man. Indeed, God Himself is described as reflecting over the plight of man rather than as contemplating eternal ideas. His mind is preoccupied with man, with the concrete actualities of history rather than with the timeless issues of thought.”¹⁶

The *prophetic* tempers our individual, contemplative journeys from becoming self-involved, immersing them in the tragic circumstances of life, in the plight of the poor and oppressed, and even providing the fiery impetus for their undertaking. It clarifies that the “yes” to our contemplative journeys also demands a “no” to all that in the world which violates our shared humanity. It entices, even demands, of us to reach beyond religious and spiritual boundaries into partnership with all who are struggling to build a better world. In particular, it leads us into a *dialogical dialogue* (see endnote for brief description) with modern social theory, critical theory, cultural critiques, hermeneutical contexts, politics and economics (this last but not least as the “profit-motive” may be the most insidious evil currently at work in our world).¹⁷ It expands our religious quest to heartfelt conversation and “communicative action” with those from religious traditions other than our own, with atheists and agnostics—with all those united in a common yearning for a more just world.¹⁸

By *interspiritual*, we refer to a term first introduced by Brother Wayne Teasdale, a lay Catholic monk ordained as a Christian *sannyasi* (an ascetical monk in the Hindu tradition) by Fr. Bede Griffiths.¹⁹ Brother Teasdale introduced the term in his 1999 book *The Mystic Heart: Discovering a Universal Spirituality in the World's Religions*, to denote a 'new mysticism' emerging out of the "sharing of ultimate experiences across [religious] traditions," in synergy with struggles for social and ecological justice and artistic creativity.²⁰ He described this new mysticism:

It will be an enhanced understanding of the inner life through assimilating the psychological, moral, aesthetic, spiritual, and literary treasures of the world's religions. Each tradition will define itself in relation to every other viable tradition of the inner life; each will take into account the totality of the spiritual journey...

...

It is deeply concerned with the plight of all those who suffer, wherever they are...

....

It follows a strict adherence to ecological justice ...

...

It doesn't just depend on books or spiritual reading, but looks to art, music, and movies ... universal languages of vast sacred potential ... to nourish contemplative life...

...

It recognizes that we are part of a much larger community ... the human, the earth, the solar system, our galaxy, and the universe itself...

...

Intermysticism is the deepest expression of the religious dimension of human life. It is the actual religion of each one of us when we arrive at the point of spiritual maturity.²¹

Contemporary theologian Beverly Lanzetta has also written extensively on an emerging spiritual impulse, testifying to its revelatory nature and ontologically emergent quality:

I use the term 'global spirituality' or 'global theology' to emphasize the emergence of a new planetary consciousness, breaking through traditional religious categories and disciplinary boundaries, that is affecting all life studies and systems. Global consciousness is revealing a new type of religious experience—what we might call multi-religion or interspiritual—that is giving rise to novel forms of spiritual practice, and new ways of living and approaching the spiritual journey and God.

In naming it 'revelatory', my intention is to emphasize that this multi-religious spiritual focus ... emerges as a faith experience of the utmost seriousness that compels each person. ... [It] is born of prayers and tears. It is not a superficial entertainment or a naïve belief. ... Thus global spirituality is not a personal construction but an inflow from the divine, a re-vealing of a new way of being religious. It is a faith experience, a call from God, to become more loving, to become more holy.

This call to religious openness is initiated not by religions or masters, but by the action of the divine in the souls of people around the globe. It is a direct touching of the inner spark of the soul by Divine Mystery that is calling contemporary pilgrims—many of whom never thought about leaving their traditions—to a deeper experience of the sacred that is related to but may be outside of formal religious community. While individual in the context of life experience, this global spiritual movement shares common spiritual processes and virtues that herald the unfolding of a new revelatory consciousness for humanity.²²

I intend to use *interspirituality* primarily to denote an emergent attitude of presence based exploration among and between wisdom traditions and individual spiritual paths, engaged with social theory and cultural critiques, scientific insights and developmental psychology, political and economic discourse—calling us to “dialogical dialogue” with one another and potentially leading to new insights, new types of communities, and “communicative action” especially in the areas of joint social, cultural and political endeavors. I believe this understanding of interspirituality, as a reciprocal sharing of secular realizations and contemplative gifts—in which each person’s insights help to affirm, deepen, and direct the other’s journey—is a framework which can speak to a new generation of spiritually hungry youth, while allowing for inter-generational bridges to be built between elders, wisdom traditions, secular traditions and the younger generation.

This *dialogical* understanding of interspirituality puts a premium on the creation of intimate circles of dialogue and community. One of the great examples of such a circle has been the *Snowmass Interspiritual Dialogue Fellowship*, an ongoing thirty-year experiment originally convened by Catholic Cistercian monk Father Thomas Keating, O.C.S.O., in 1984. It aims to bring together “authentic seekers” from varying religious traditions, with an emphasis

not on formal theology or religious law or external observances. ... It seeks to share the experiential rather than merely the theological, the interior content rather than the external form. ‘Experience’ here doesn't mean that this is dialog for those who have experienced some sort of enlightenment or altered states. It is a sharing of participants' experiences of the spiritual path, whatever those experiences might be at whatever level. Inter-spiritual dialog must, above all else, be authentic.²³

By *pragmatic*, I denote a general orientation that looks to sensibly and reasonably assess the practical dimensions of any theory, practice, or movement. For me *pragmatic* is a multi-dimensional term. In my work in intellectual life and thought, part of my pragmatic sensibility is an aspiration to be an “organic intellectual” as described by Cornel West in his *The American Evasion of Philosophy*, as “participants in the life of the mind who revel in ideas and relate ideas to action by means of creating, constituting, or consolidating constituencies for moral aims and political purposes.”²⁴ Another dimension of the pragmatic means taking into account the contemplative dimension of life,

the ability for human beings to mature spiritually. This *pragmatic* orientation towards our contemplative traditions sees them as human endeavors to investigate and refine practices that help to accelerate this process of spiritual maturation.

Yet another dimension to my use of pragmatic is in the search for “absolutes.” Pragmatically speaking, the search for absolutes tends always to fade into mystery, whether this absolute be Buddhist enlightenment, Brahman, the Godhead, or quantum physics. This principle is perhaps found most profoundly in the apophatic discourses of contemplative traditions; Pseudo-Dionysus, Meister Eckhart and the “Cloud of Unknowing” being famous examples in the Christian tradition, Nargarjuna and Chandrakirti in the Tibetan Buddhist tradition. John Thatamanil, in *The Immanent Divine: God, Creation, and The Human Predicament*, shows that mystery lies even at the heart of Sankara’s radical nondualism and is enhanced rather than diminished through “knowledge of Brahman.”²⁵ Nikolas Berdyaev, the Russian philosopher-theologian said, “Life’ may become for us the symbol of the highest value and the highest good, but these are in their turn but symbols of true being, and being itself is but a symbol of final mystery.”²⁶

I view this “apophasis” as constitutive of Ultimate Reality, an “aesthetic doorway” found in all endeavors that speaks ever to new life, new creation, and re-orientation within the very currents of Life itself. It is found in the unending contexts of hermeneutics, in Heisenberg’s “uncertainty principle,” and in mathematics, the epitome of logic, in Gödel’s Incompleteness Theorem. This last a beautiful, philosophically profound revelation, proven within the machinations of logic itself and thereby embodying what I call the “divine humility” of mathematics. It tells us that that no matter what type of “logical system” we may build, there will always exist “truth”—“truth” even according to the very dictates of our system—which can never be found within the system itself. The “aesthetic doorway” opens even among the heavy confines of pure logic...

A poignant contemporary apophatic discourse worth mentioning here, informed as it is by postmodern critiques of embedded power structures and a Foucault-esque understanding of the power of language and concepts to oppress, is Beverly Lanzetta’s *Radical Wisdom: A Feminist Mystical Theology*. In it, Lanzetta develops the idea of the “dark night of the feminine” and the *via feminina* in relation to women’s contemplative journeys, with a recognition that our philosophical, theological, and religious conceptual understandings have been developed almost exclusively by men, reflecting men’s experience of the world, and too often unconsciously inflict a subtle violence in the depths of women’s souls by discounting their authentic experience of life. Lanzetta tells us that

Women cannot simply retrieve or re-appropriate tradition. They must find a deeper spirituality, a new mysticism...a new interpretation of such historically embedded

concepts as enlightenment, salvation, mystical union, and similar terms. This disjunction between semantic descriptions of spiritual life and women's actual experience needs to be acknowledged, questioned, and explored.

...

Standing outside or beyond the logic that formed their language, spirituality, and theology, the radical mysticism of *via feminina* functions as a continual un-saying, a continual disruption of the previous thousands of years of "saying" by patriarchal cultures and religions.

...

It is at this point that a woman's spiritual life moves from affirmation to negation, and then into a deeper negation—what I term the "dark night of the feminine," ... in order to "un-say" and "un-become" the internalized inferiority that oppresses or denigrates her soul. Most significant is that this mystical process of deconstruction not only involves a woman's personal feelings and identities but also includes the whole range of cultural, religious, racial, and social attitudes and structures that participate in and perpetuate worldwide abuses against females. Simultaneously, this feminist path of negation heals women's abused consciousness and restores women's dignity and worth. It thus does not remain in a permanent suspension of un-naming and unknowing but returns to language bearing the fruits of a new self-understanding and new vision of the sacred.

...

It is in her core, where a woman is alone with her divine source, that she works out her freedom. ... [I]here comes a point in a woman's spiritual life where she is in uncharted territory. She must forge her own path, because even her religious traditions fail her.²⁷

Lanzetta's contemplative development of the *via feminina* and "dark night of the feminine" may hold treasures well beyond the spiritual paths of women, offering a powerful transformative pathway for all those exposed to oppressive cultural worldviews, allowing them to let go of and transmute the pain and humiliation inflicted on them and unconsciously absorbed into their being, and subsequently to discover their true self worth and authentic divine core.

Two Existential Examples

Two differing examples of a contemplative prophetic pragmatism are reflected in the lives of Howard Thurman and Martin Luther King, Jr.²⁸ Cornel West has called Dr. King "the most significant and successful organic *intellectual* in American history. Never before in our past has a figure outside of elected public office linked the life of the mind to social change with such moral persuasiveness and political effectiveness."²⁹ Not only did King play the most socially profound role that an American intellectual *and* an American religious figure have ever played, he did so within the context of lasting and universal spiritual truths, making him a spiritual leader for all of humankind. James Baldwin, the great black author, said that King "has succeeded, in a way no Negro before him

has managed to do, to carry the battle into the individual heart and make its resolution the province of the individual will. He has made it a matter, on both sides of the racial fence, of self-examination.”³⁰

King’s dedication to Gandhian nonviolence is well known. Gary Dorrien, in *The Making of American Liberal Theology: Crisis, Irony, and Postmodernity*, recounts King speaking to an angry crowd following the bombing of his home in Montgomery, Alabama, “We cannot solve this problem through retaliatory violence. We must meet violence with nonviolence. Remember the words of Jesus: ‘He who lives by the sword will perish by the sword.’ We must love our white brothers no matter what they do to us.”³¹

King’s dedication to the dignity of the human person, in the most trying of circumstances, is perhaps unsurpassed in modern times. Dorrien calls him “almost superhumanly magnanimous” and presents King—philosophically, theologically, politically and socially—as most deeply concerned with the sacredness of human personality and his own personal relationship with God. He describes King’s favorite sermon, “The Dimensions of the Complete Life,” in which King speaks of the good life as being about the flourishing of personality and the creative integration of personal, social, and ultimate concerns.³² Dorrien goes on to quote King (and here I use quotes from multiple King writings):

This personal idealism remains today my basic philosophical position. ... It gave me grounding for the idea of a personal God, and it gave me a metaphysical basis for the dignity and worth of all human personality.³³

There must be a recognition of the sacredness of human personality. Deeply rooted in our political and religious heritage is the conviction that every man is an heir to a legacy of dignity and worth.³⁴

It is my feeling that King represents, more than any other individual (with Abraham Lincoln running a close second), the soul of America. He physically embodied our potential, the spiritual potency of our *Declaration of Independence*, more than even any of the founding fathers (the majority of them being slave owners themselves). Formed in the crucible of the black church, he later held a creative tension between liberal and neo-orthodox perspectives, developing his own “personal” view of Christianity which sustained him;³⁵ inspired by the power of Gandhi’s *satyagraha* he embraced nonviolence at deeper and deeper levels throughout his life, enhancing his understanding and dedication to Christian *agape*, which he described as “an overflowing love which is purely spontaneous, unmotivated, groundless, and creative. ... not a weak, passive love. It is love in action ... love seeking to preserve and create community. ... In the final analysis, *agape* means a recognition

of the fact that all life is interrelated. All humanity is involved in a single process ... Whether we call it an unconscious process, an impersonal Brahman, or a Personal Being of matchless power and infinite love, there is a creative force in this universe that works to bring the disconnected aspects of reality into a harmonious whole.”³⁶

For Howard Thurman, the mystical element was ever present in his life, telling us, “From my childhood I have been on the scent of the tie that binds life at a level so deep that the final privacy of the individual would be reinforced rather than threatened.”³⁷ The implicit connection here between the individual and communal—between the personal and universal—was a focal point throughout Thurman’s life.³⁸ As Thurman said, “Personality is something more than mere individuality—it is a fulfillment of the logic of individuality in community.”³⁹ Luther Smith, Jr., in his introduction to Thurman’s *Essential Writings* (one of a series on Modern Spiritual Masters), notes how Thurman looked to the spirituals of black slaves in his early work as a particularity that is a “source of wisdom, instruction, and truth.” Quoting Thurman: “And this is the miracle of their achievement causing them to take their place alongside the great creative religious thinkers of the human race. They made a worthless life, the life of chattel property, a mere thing, a body, *worth living*.”⁴⁰

Smith characterizes Thurman’s approach to spirituality as integrated completely with the “social questions” of his day,⁴¹ recounting in *The Mystic as Prophet* how Thurman’s teacher Rufus Jones, a well-known Quaker mystic, worked with Thurman to find a “vision of how spiritual power could address the conditions that oppressed him as a black man in America.”⁴²

Part of that vision lay in an

emphasis upon mystical consciousness as the way to discern God’s presence and will. This mystical consciousness reveals the Divine which requires a fellowship of mutual caring and serving, and a Divine which dwells in humanity. This consciousness is the basis for social transformation.

[It is] deeply committed to a theology which claims issues of justice, freedom, and peace as inherent interests of the religious venture. Commitment to the spiritual life is a commitment to that power which is able to save the world.⁴³

Thurman’s approach to these social questions lay more with building communities that crossed racial, religious, and cultural boundaries, and primarily through his spoken word—which seemed to radiate his contemplative transmission to the many who heard him—rather than through the leadership of social organizations or mass movements.⁴⁴ Thurman’s vocation differed from King’s in this regard. Both shared the gift of the spoken word, but their differing vocations can be

seen as an existential example of unique gifts and the deepening of personality that comes into being as one matures spiritually—examples of the particular in the universal.

Thurman founded the first inter-racial and inter-cultural church in the country, the Fellowship Church in San Francisco, of which he said, “It was not the unique essence of any particular creed or faith; it was timeless and time-bound, the idiom of all creeds and contained in none...”⁴⁵ He saw Christianity as but one particular religious expression that could not lay claim to being *the* universal expression of truth.⁴⁶ Thurman had a developmental, evolutionary understanding of religion, truth, and spiritual consciousness. As Smith describes Thurman’s spirituality: “Clarity ... evolves as one experiences the greatest teacher—Life. ... Life is forever offering new revelations ... Belief must be ‘fluid’ not only to honor a *new sense* of God’s will and activity, but also to embrace God’s freedom to become new.”⁴⁷

Thurman captures the essence of his “contemplative prophetic pragmatism” in *The Search for Common Ground*:

For the religious man, there rides always on his horizon a timeless, transcendent monitor by which not only is the direction of his life somehow guided but also by which he is stabilized in the midst of the contradictions of his experience. But this does not release him from the necessity of seeking always to locate his profoundest religious insights in the very structure of his life as a living human being, spawned from the womb of the earth, and as a participant in that which sustains and supports all life on the planet. Ultimately, all the dualisms of his experience as a creature must exhaust themselves in a corroborating unity fundamental to life and not merely dependent upon that which transcends life by whatever name he seeks to patronize it.⁴⁸

Towards a Philosophical Mythos

*“You cannot look directly at the source of light; you turn your back to it so that you may see—not the light, but the illuminated things. Light is invisible, so to with the myth. ... Myth is that which we take for granted, that which we do not question. ... The myth is transparent like the light, and the mythical story—mythologumenon—is only the form, the garment in which the myth happens to be expressed, enwrapped, illumined.”*⁴⁹

– Raimon Panikkar, *Myth, Faith, and Hermeneutics*

New monastics understand themselves as beings in the process of becoming, where this process of becoming is ontologically equal and advaitically intertwined with a transcendent reality existing outside of time. It is this transcendent reality existing outside of time, experienced within the depths of our own being and subsequently cognized as the center of all that exists, that is the basis, foundation, and guarantor of our eventual success in the adventure of becoming. It is important to

recognize, however, that the transcendent reality, when it takes us away from *this* world, can also be an impediment to the process of becoming, which is to say an impediment to its own Self.

An awareness of transcendent reality can remove all defensiveness in our lives and open us to divine expressions of compassion, love and wisdom. The insight it brings removes all fear—but it can potentially become an escape from the process of becoming, removing the suffering and struggle so necessary for incarnation, and creating a widening distance between our self and our fellow humans. It is a paradox—that which reveals a pre-existent unity can also create a tremendous gap between our lived experience and that of those around us.

Creativity, freedom, suffering, transformation, democratization, organicity, *contemplation-action*, these are all key elements in a new monastic theology. Which brings me now to the briefest of brief surveys of four philosophers whose work may prove a fecund ground for new monastic theology: F. W. J. Schelling (a 19th century German idealist who had an intimate and fascinating relationship with Hegel), Nikolai Berdyaev (an early 20th century Russian philosopher often associated with the Russian sophianic tradition, though he lived much of his life in exile after being jailed numerous times by both the monarchy and subsequently the Bolshevik regime)⁵⁰, Nishida Kitaro (a 20th century Japanese philosopher who has been called “the most influential figure in the development of twentieth century Japanese thought”)⁵¹, and Alfred North Whitehead. Whitehead is by far the most widely known and studied in American academic circles, his philosophy inspiring the “process thought” and “process theological” traditions in contemporary American theology. As such, and due to space considerations, I will refrain from further reviewing his work here, but for those who know it I trust the affinity with his ideas will not be difficult to see.

Charles Hartshorne,⁵² in a preface to *Berdyaev's Philosophy of History: An Existentialist Theory of Social Creativity and Eschatology*, groups together Schelling, Whitehead and Berdyaev as part of a small group of thinkers who were able to conceive of God as “supreme permanence and supreme capacity for novelty. [God] is thus the synthesis of eternity and time, absoluteness and relativity.”⁵³ Hartshorne also hints that in writing from this perspective Berdyaev offers what may be the “most rational of all theories” regarding a theodicy (one intriguing element of Berdyaev’s theodicy is his positing of *the tragic* as existing before good and evil, and existing even after their transcendence as well, implying that “tragedy exists within the Divine life itself”).⁵⁴

Schelling and Berdyaev both put the realities of freedom, creativity, individuality, and ethics at the very basis of existence itself. Schelling proposed as axiomatic a common “organicity” that lay at the root of both theoretical and practical knowledge, or being and knowing, where the “highest

speculative concepts” had to be “simultaneously the most profound ethical concepts,” i.e., the inherent structure of the underlying identity between being and knowing had to be essentially ethical.⁵⁵ Berdyaev said that

ethics is a philosophy of freedom ... [and] ethical knowledge ... is the final stage of the philosophy of the spirit, the harvest of philosophical life. ... [B]ut ethics cannot be merely soteriology, it is also a theory of values, of man’s creative activity. ... Ethics is bound to be prophetic, and, what is even more important, it is bound to be personal. ... [It] is connected with the mystery of man [sic]... [with] the destiny and vocation of man [sic]. ... The new ethics must be knowledge not only of good and evil, but also of the tragic...⁵⁶

Boris Jakim, a Berdyaevian scholar, tells us this new ethics: “will emphasize the importance of personality ... arise in freedom and strive for compassion ... [and be] an ethics of free creativeness ... Berdyaev formulates an ethics of Divine Humanity, where man is the creative collaborator of God in the work of instituting goodness in the world.”⁵⁷ For Berdyaev, freedom itself “is not determined by God; it is part of the nothing out of which God created the world,”⁵⁸ and similarly to Schelling he proposed, “Philosophy can only be about one’s own ideas, about the spirit, about man [sic] in and for himself [sic]; in other words, it must be an intellectual expression of the philosopher’s own destiny.”⁵⁹

For Schelling, freedom was the “alpha and omega” that provided a unifying basis for integrating ontology and epistemology.⁶⁰ He famously critiqued Hegel for arriving at his seemingly theoretically complete and intellectually stunning philosophical system by leaving out the messiness of lived experience, “just as a surgeon who promises to cure your ailing leg by amputating it.”⁶¹ Instead, he developed a personalistic and developmental model of philosophy with freedom and organicity at its core. He argued that “all progress in philosophy [is] only progress through *development*; every individual system which earns this name can be viewed as a seed which indeed slowly and gradually, but inexorably and in every direction, advances itself in multifariousness development.”⁶² Bruce Matthews, in his *Schelling’s Organic Form of Philosophy*, goes on to explain this statement: “The telos of philosophy lies not in the gradual homogenization of thought into one all embracing logic, but rather in developing a multitude of systems, all of which should offer us ever more diverse and complex ways of understanding our existence.”⁶³

Matthew’s goes on to argue in his book that at the heart of Schelling’s work is “grasping how what is radically other is actually related to us,” through a unifying of “logos and mythos” in an aesthetic experience of organic knowing that is not other than the self-organizing dynamism of nature itself.⁶⁴ In doing so, Schelling not only “integrates the transcendental into the very center of

the temporal world of living creatures, but conversely ... inject[s] life and its dynamic development into the noumenal world of reason.”⁶⁵ In other words, as opposed to Kant’s analytic categories and dualistic understanding which posits the thinking mind as existing in an unchanging realm and then confronted in existence by an “other,” Schelling’s ideal “is a truly *synthetic* unity, which through its archetype of autopoiesis and self-organization informs the evolution and development of all nature, including the noetic system of philosophy.”⁶⁶

In this we hear echoes of Martin Buber’s *I-Thou* relationship and Raimon Panikkar’s “dialogical dialogue.” It also speaks to the new monastic methodology of “dialogical sophiology,” an organic, personalized methodology that helps one to form a mature philosophical-theological framework under the guidance of the Holy Spirit and the living, aesthetic experience and presence of *Sophia*, Wisdom Herself, “delighting in the children of man [‘woman’ here would seem particularly more apt].”⁶⁷ It requires a dialogical relationship with the *Other*, including other people, other religious, wisdom and cultural traditions, modern scientific, psychological, and sociological insights, political and economic theory, developmental psychology, etc.

Nishida Kitaro, founder of the “Kyoto School” of Japanese philosophy, worked throughout his life to develop a philosophy that embodied the insights of Zen Buddhism in the language of Western philosophy, making him a particularly intriguing figure for East-West dialogue. Here we mention just a few insights from Robert Carter’s *The Nothingness Beyond God*, the first book length study of Nishida’s work in English.⁶⁸ Thomas Kasulis, in his excellent and succinct foreword, tells us that Nishida was concerned primarily with the dichotomy between fact, or the *is*, and value, or the *ought*.⁶⁹ This separation itself was foreign in the context of Zen Buddhism. Nishida first worked with William James’s concept of “pure experience” as a way to articulate that “science, morality, art and religion share a single preconceptual drive (‘the will’) to unity, a process that Nishida called ‘the intellectual intuition’” (a term also used by Schelling in a somewhat similar fashion).⁷⁰ As did Schelling, Nishida proceeded to construct various philosophical systems throughout his lifetime, trying to capture this fundamental insight, working as well with the basic assumption of Zen Buddhism that language is not adequate to describe reality, while silence is also inadequate. Toshihiko Izutsu describes this problem in *Toward a Philosophy of Zen Buddhism*: “Certainly, by not using language we could make silence function as a symbol of the non-articulated; but, then, the articulated aspect of that non-articulated will totally be lost sight of. In other words, the non-articulated will be presented as sheer “nothing” in the negative sense of the word, which is exactly the contrary of what Zen holds to be true.”⁷¹

Nishida's primary thrust in dealing with this famous western problem between the *is* and the *ought*, between the existential and the normative, or between being and thinking, is the development of three *bashos*, or "contextual fields of judgment," that function as holistic hermeneutic circles. The culminating *basbo* is one of "action in the world," the so-called *basbo* of "absolute nothingness." Here one's sense of self, the "I," becomes neither a reified entity coming into contact with other reified entities, nor a "transcendental ego" that is substance based, but rather

an action, what Nishida called the 'acting intuition.' So the *basbo* of idealism which sees the self as both subject and object is itself encompassed by a third *basbo* the contextual field of 'absolute nothingness.' The acting intuition is both an active involvement in the world and an intuitive reception of information about the world. It is a process, not a thing, so it can never be either the subject or object of itself. ... The acting-intuiting process (the absolute nothingness) is, therefore, the true basis of judgment about both fact and value.⁷²

Nishida's "acting-intuition" connects to the principles of freedom and creativity, and would seem to have similarities with Christian contemplative notions of the experience of the Holy Spirit "living through one." At the same time, it also brings up creative dialogical tensions.

In Hartshorne's previously mentioned preface, he posits Whitehead as being in sync with Buddhist philosophy by ultimately rejecting the idea of a "soul substance," while Berdyaev and Schelling maintain the notion of a developing "soul." Hartshorne leans towards Whitehead and the Buddhists, while I lean towards the notion of a developing soul as an orienting "story" that speaks to the reality of a process of *spiritual maturity*—while at the same time not discounting the Buddhist realization of "no-self," and with a final caveat that out of the apophatic can emerge paradoxical experience and experience beyond language (or even "non-experience" as it may be described by some, e.g. Sankara), which can then move us into deeper explorations of these issues.⁷³ One ongoing contemporary scholarly attempt to peer deeper into these issues is Jorge Ferrer and Jacob Sherman's "participatory turn" in religious studies (see endnote for more).⁷⁴

I believe these creative tensions contain within them the potential for "ontological emergence." Berdyaev saw knowledge itself as ontologically emergent, a "living, existential act" in which "something happens to reality" and which "implies man's spiritual creative activity," with freedom as its basis. "If the knower is a part of being, knowledge is active and means a change in being. Knowledge takes place within being and is an event within being, a change in it. ... It therefore has a cosmogonic character."⁷⁵ Beverly Lanzetta gives an excellent description of this in contrasting the so-called "perennial philosophy" with Panikkar's "cosmotheandric vision":

It is at this juncture that the clearest distinction can be made between Panikkar's work and that of the perennialists. While both speak of a spiritual oneness that occurs beyond distinctions, the perennial philosophy holds that unity is an esoteric pre-existent realm from which all religions have descended and to which they will return. Thus, the richness of diverse spiritual universes and revelatory expressions is important within their respective lineage, but spiritual illumination rather than mutual interpenetration is the necessary medium for the esoteric "return." Panikkar, on the other hand, understands the meeting of religions to take place through the *transformation* into spirit. This transformation is dynamic, communal, and historical. Dialogue, mutual understanding, and cross-fertilization among the mystical universes of each tradition are essential for transformation, since in his cosmotheandric project they are constitutive of the building up of reality. The process of dialogue, of understanding, of crossing over into the sacred realms of another tradition is the medium of transformation...⁷⁶

Let us not forget here either the place of the apophatic, the ever present "aesthetic doorway" that lies always in waiting, endlessly and in all endeavors, with the potential for new being, new creation, new knowledge and understanding, and therefore more potent forms of compassion, love and wisdom.

In Conclusion

Our resulting orientation is one of individualized philosophical-religious frameworks, in a symbiotic and synergistic *I-Thou* relationship with one another, working together within a mysterious movement towards solidarity, friendship and communicative action, while deepening the individual expressions of those involved. In this, the highest state of both "being" and "knowing" is one of *contemplation-action* which synthesizes a "knowing" within it, orchestrated by the "Holy Spirit" or the "perfectly functioning Buddha-mind."⁷⁷ It occurs in harmony with the organic unity of the human family (and all Life), maintaining an apophatic openness, while not forgetting the intrinsic nature of struggle and tragedy within the concrete circumstances of lived life.

Rather than medicating us to the sufferings of life, this orientation only plunges us deeper into existential reality, yet with tools to work more skillfully for its *redemption*, which need not necessarily be found merely in the future establishment of the "Kingdom of Heaven," but is also present within this "contemplation-action" itself. Recall Pierre Teilhard's quote with which we began, the awesome and adventurous responsibility we have for "building our own souls"—an *opus* into which something "enters from all the elements of the earth." Yet it also tells us that this cultivation of our souls, this "individual achievement," can only be measured in the light of a mysterious "completing of the world." Only within this greater *opus*, infinitely transcending yet

narrowly determining the arena in which our work takes place, can we measure our redemptive journeys.

As regards the organic “harmony” of our work, I am reminded of the words of Raimon Panikkar (with a Heraclitus assist):

My motto would then be *concordia discors*, ‘discordant concord’ ... as the always paradoxical Heraclitus liked to put it: ‘The mysterious harmony is stronger than the evident one’; or again, ‘The unspoken harmony is superior to the verbalized one.’

But we may still quote:

Kai ek ton diapheronton

Kallistern harmonian

Kai panta kath erin ginesthai.

(And from divergences
The most beautiful harmony [arises],
And all happens through struggle.)⁷⁸

Let us end now our exploration by turning to Cecil Collins, one of the great artists of the twentieth century, for a description of the *aesthetic* act itself. I consider the quintessential human act to be fundamentally an aesthetic one, regardless of the arena of one’s endeavors. When the human being finds the place of true authenticity, of “contemplation-action,” the act itself—whether philosophic, prophetic, secular or sacred—is always revealed as an artistic expression of one’s deepest being. Collins offers us a descriptive and telling fragrance of that quintessential human act, the *aesthetic*:

The artist ... like the priest and monk ... is the representative of the affirmative integrity of life. ... [B]y dreaming the dreams of man [sic] ... he [sic] then begins to change man’s [sic] dreams from within. This is the most important point of all.

...

And for an artist the greatest happiness is to have failed at doing the perfect, and the greatest misery is never to have attempted it.⁷⁹

Collins then makes an important distinction between creation and self-expression:

self-expression is not creation. There is a difference.

Creation is transformation, something quite different, and no transformation takes place unless the energy is qualified and denied by limitations. For self-expressionists there are no limitations. It’s just a relief, getting rid of something. But the real creative artist has a vision and a perfection which is qualified by materials. You imagine something is infinite, but then it has suddenly got to be in a concrete shape. The shape, the size, the whole thing resists you, and this qualification is pain, and the pain purifies the energy and transforms it. ... The energy becomes transformed through this mutual qualification and then it’s in a state of grace.⁸⁰

As for the creative act itself:

Real creation of a work of art has nothing to do with having ideas that you wish to put in action, or having a programme, no matter how grand—it is a revealing, an unveiling of the nature of reality through evocation and through climate, atmosphere, through musicality. And therefore it's always active, always alive ... It is not necessary to understand in order to create but it is necessary to create in order to understand. ... It is a wonderful balance between revelation, as it were, and form.⁸¹

New monasticism is ultimately a search for the deepest humanity in us all. It is in this search that we are united, not only to our fellow monks, but to all who long to birth a new world that lives and breathes of the Spirit, to all who desire to come to the utter depths of their being, and then to enter the world through that doorway. A new monastic is one who feels the calling to her own Evolution, her own depth of Spirit, her own transformational path, and responds. She embarks on this path in order to better serve all of Life, not knowing where this journey will take her, but knowing that she can no longer view anything in her life as separate from this journey. She is motivated by her ideals of love and compassion for others, as well as an impenetrable belief in the Truth and Reality of human spiritual maturation; of its transformative power, grace and sustaining ground. She is committed to serving the world in growing degrees of sacrificial love, vocational embodiment, skillful wisdom, and joy. Any such person may rightly be called a “new monastic.”

¹ Pierre Teilhard, *The Divine Milieu* (1960; Perennial Classic Edition, New York: HarperCollins, 2001), 24. I have changed the male-centric language (use of “he” and “his”) in this passage to reflect gender inclusive language (“we” and “our”). Italics Teilhard's.

² Raimon Panikkar, *Blessed Simplicity: The Monk as Universal Archetype* (New York: Seabury, 1982), 29

³ Raimon Panikkar, *The Cosmotheandric Experience* (New York: Orbis Books, 1993), v.

⁴ Panikkar, *Blessed Simplicity*, 7-11, 20, 28. Italics original.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 46.

⁶ St. Teresa of Avila, *Essential Mystics*, ed. Andrew Harvey (HarperOne, San Francisco CA, 1997), 206.

⁷ Panikkar, *Blessed Simplicity*, 60.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 84-85.

⁹ Paul Valliere, *Modern Russian Theology* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2000), 151. I am indebted to Christopher Pramuk for references to Valliere's work in his *Sophia: The Hidden Christ of Thomas Merton* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2009).

¹⁰ Valliere, *Modern Russian Theology*, 161.

¹¹ Christopher Pramuk, *Sophia: The Hidden Christ of Thomas Merton* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2009), xxiii.

¹² *Ibid.*, xxvi.

¹³ Ibid., 237, 246-247 – quoting Bulgakov as cited in Valliere, *Modern Russian Theology*, 336 and Rowan Williams in *Sergii Bulgakov: Towards a Russian Political Philosophy* (Edinburgh: T and T Clark, 1999), 128-129.

¹⁴ Pramuk, *Sophia*, 207-208.

¹⁵ This is not the same definition of contemplative as it is normally used within the Christian tradition, where contemplation refers strictly to an act of grace. While in the rarified air of ontological nuance, it may perhaps be argued that this definition does not deviate from a traditional Christian understanding, for practical, *pragmatic* purposes we include both human effort and grace, religious experience and ordinary experiences of life, suffering as well as love, as all possible elements within what is meant by *contemplative* as a process of spiritual maturation. Neither is this the same as the traditional Buddhist understanding of contemplative, which is used to describe deep discursive reflection (*meditatio* in the Christian tradition).

¹⁶ Abraham J., Heschel, *The Prophets* (New York: Harper & Row, 1962), 5.

¹⁷ For more on the *dialogical dialogue* see the chapter “Dialogical Dialogue” in McEntee and Bucko, *The New Monasticism*. It is a term used by Raimon Panikkar to describe a dialogue that proceeds from the basis of a Buberian *I-Thou* relationship, from a recognition that the *other* is not really ‘other’: “The rationale for the dialogical dialogue is that the *thou* has a proper and inalienable ontology. The *thou* is a source of self-understanding that I cannot assimilate from my own perspective alone.” (Raimon Panikkar, *The Intra-Religious Dialogue*, [Mahwah: Paulist Press, 1999], 25) Ilia Delio describes it as: “The crossing over into the religious world of the other [which] can be a moment of revelation or enlightenment in which the encounter between different religious or cultural [or individual] worlds reaches a new stage of being. Such dialogue ... is not only a growth in human consciousness but ‘the whole universe expands.’” (Ilia Delio, *Christ in Evolution* [Maryknoll: Orbis, 2008], 101) Ewert Cousins said of it, “We will be evoking and nurturing the complexified form of religious consciousness that will be characteristic of the global community of the future. We will discover that this kind of interreligious dialogue is itself a spiritual process, *it is the characteristic collective journey of our time.*” (Ewert Cousins, *Christ in the 21st Century*, [New York: Continuum, 1998], 118, italics mine)

¹⁸ Jurgen Habermas’ “theory of communicative action” is an intriguing line of thought here, shining a laser beam as it does on the *intersubjective* nature of rationality and language, and could hold particular relevance here for joint action divorced from the “systemic imperatives” which “force an assimilation of communicative action to formally organized domains of action.” (*The Theory of Communicative Action, Vol. 2* [Boston: Beacon Press, 1987], 403) In certain ways, the *dialogical* orientation of the new monastic has parallels to this type of communicative action divorced from cultural norms, while also being informed by the contemplative process and the knowledge communicated through it (and here we can understand “knowledge” in a Berdyaevian sense as ontologically emergent, a “living, existential act” in which “something happens to reality” and which “implies man’s spiritual creative activity,” with freedom as its basis. “Knowledge takes place within being and is an event within being, a change in it. ... It therefore has a cosmogonic character.” (Berdyaev, *Destiny of Man*, 3, 12. See endnote 26 for publisher)

¹⁹ For a short description of the Christian *sannyasi*, see www.skyfarm.org/Prayer.htm.

²⁰ Wayne Teasdale, *The Mystic Heart: Discovering a Universal Spirituality in the World’s Religions* (Novato: New World Library, 1999), 26.

²¹ Ibid., 238-240, 243.

²² Lanzetta, Beverly, *Emerging Heart: Global Spirituality and the Sacred* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2007), 53. Quote is adapted from book passage and found directly at www.beverlylanzetta.net, “The Emerging Heart of Global Spirituality, Meditation 2” and “Meditation 4.”

²³ Quotation is from the official *Snowmass Interspiritual Dialogue* application letter.

²⁴ Cornel West, *The American Evasion of Philosophy* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1989), 6.

²⁵ John J. Thatamanil, *The Immanent Divine: God, Creation and the Human Predicament, An East-West Conversation* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2006)

²⁶ Nicolas Berdyaev, *The Destiny of Man* (San Rafael: Semantron Press, 2009), 22.

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- ²⁷ Beverly Lanzetta, *Radical Wisdom: A Feminist Mystical Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2005), 12, 16, 34.
- ²⁸ I am indebted to Cornel West for the term “prophetic pragmatism.” See *American Evasion*.
- ²⁹ Cornell West, *Prophetic Fragments: Illuminations of the Crisis in American Religion & Culture* (Trenton: Africa World Press, 1988), 3.
- ³⁰ James Baldwin, “The Highroad of Destiny,” in C. Eric Lincoln, ed., *Martin Luther King, Jr., A Profile* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1970), 111. As quoted by James M. Washington, in his introduction to *A Testament of Hope*, ed. by James Washington (New York: HarperCollins, 1991), xiv.
- ³¹ Martin Luther King, Jr., *Stride toward Freedom: The Montgomery Story* (New York: Harper & Bros., 1958), 137-138. As quoted in Gary Dorrien, *The Making of American Liberal Theology: Crisis, Irony, & Postmodernity, 1950-2005* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2006), 156.
- ³² Dorrien, *American Liberal Theology: Crisis*, 157.
- ³³ King, *Stride Toward Freedom*, 100. Quoted in Dorrien, *American Liberal Theology: Crisis*, 154.
- ³⁴ King, *Stride Toward Freedom*, 220-221. Quoted in Dorrien, *American Liberal Theology: Crisis*, 157.
- ³⁵ See King, *Testament of Hope*, “Pilgrimage to Nonviolence,” 35-40.
- ³⁶ King, *Testament of Hope*, 19, 20.
- ³⁷ Howard Thurman, *The Search for Common Ground* (Richmond: Friends United Press, 1986), xiii.
- ³⁸ Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, Catholic priest and eminent paleontologist, also extensively explored this dichotomy. Though silenced by the Catholic Church during his lifetime he developed a unique understanding of the link between the personal and universal within an evolutionary context, in his notions of “super-personalization,” “Reflexion”, “the law of conservation of personality,” and his insight that “union differentiates,” connecting the evolutionary forces found in the geosphere and biosphere to the evolutionary currents at work in humanity. This work is further explored in McEntee and Bucko, *The New Monasticism*. Nicolas Berdyaev, Paul Tillich, and F.W.J. Schelling are others for whom this was a fundamental topic of reflection.
- ³⁹ Howard Thurman, “Mysticism and Social Change,” *Eden Theological Seminary Bulletin* IV (Spring Quarter, 1939), 27. As quoted in Luther Smith, Jr., *The Mystic as Prophet* (Richmond: Friends United Press, 1991), 16.
- ⁴⁰ Howard Thurman, *Deep River and The Negro Spiritual Speaks of Life and Death* (Richmond: Friends United Press, 1975), 135. As quoted in Howard Thurman, *Essential Writings*, ed. by Luther Smith, Jr. (Maryknoll: Orbis, 2006), 26.
- ⁴¹ Howard Thurman, *Essential Writings*, ed. by Luther Smith, Jr. (Maryknoll: Orbis, 2006), 14.
- ⁴² Luther Smith, Jr., *The Mystic as Prophet* (Richmond: Friends United Press, 1991), 34-35.
- ⁴³ *Ibid.*, 34-35.
- ⁴⁴ cf. Luther Smith Jr.’s *The Mystic as Prophet* and introduction to *Howard Thurman: Essential Writings*.
- ⁴⁵ Howard Thurman, *With Head and Heart* (New York: Harcourt, 1979), 162. Quoted in Thurman, *Essential Writings*, 23).
- ⁴⁶ Thurman, *Essential Writings*, 30.
- ⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 32.
- ⁴⁸ Howard Thurman, *Search for Common Ground*, xvi.
- ⁴⁹ Raimon Panikkar, *Myth, Faith, and Hermeneutics* (New York: Paulist Press, 1979), 4.
- ⁵⁰ See introduction by Donald Lowrie to Nicolai Berdyaev, *Christian Existentialism* (New York: Harper & Row, 1965).
- ⁵¹ Thomas Kasulis, Foreword to Robert E. Carter, *The Nothingness Beyond God* (St. Paul: Paragon House, 1997), ix.
- ⁵² Hartshorne was a graduate student of Whitehead’s and one of the philosophical founders of process thought. See Dorrien, *American Liberal Theology: Crisis*, 68-86.
- ⁵³ David Bonner Richardson, *Berdyaev’s Philosophy of History: An Existentialist Theory of Social Creativity and Eschatology* (The Hague, Netherlands: Springer, 1968), xii.
- ⁵⁴ Nicolas Berdyaev, *The Destiny of Man* (San Rafael: Semantron Press, 2009), 32.

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- ⁵⁵ Bruce Matthews, in the introduction to F.W.J. Schelling, *The Grounding of Positive Philosophy: The Berlin Lectures* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2007), 33.
- ⁵⁶ Berdyaev, *Destiny of Man*, 15-18, 22, 32.
- ⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, i, ii.
- ⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 25.
- ⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 7.
- ⁶⁰ Bruce Matthews, *Schelling's Organic Form of Philosophy: Life as the Schema of Freedom* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2011), 5.
- ⁶¹ F.W.J. Schelling, as quoted in Matthews, *Organic Form of Philosophy*, 4.
- ⁶² F.W.J. Schelling, as quoted in Matthews, *Organic Form of Philosophy*, xii.
- ⁶³ *Ibid.*
- ⁶⁴ Matthews, *Organic Form of Philosophy*, 9, 10.
- ⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 15.
- ⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 16.
- ⁶⁷ See chapter "Dialogical Sophiology" in McEntee and Bucko, *The New Monasticism*.
- ⁶⁸ Kasulis, Foreword to Carter, *The Nothingness Beyond God*, ix.
- ⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, xii.
- ⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, xiii.
- ⁷¹ Izutsu, Toshihiko, *Toward a Philosophy of Zen Buddhism* (Tehran: Imperial Iranian Academy of Philosophy, 1977), 131. As quoted in Carter, *Nothingness Beyond God*, 18.
- ⁷² Kasulis, Foreword to Carter, *The Nothingness Beyond God*, xv-xvi.
- ⁷³ See Thatamanil, *The Immanent Divine*, for an exploration of Sankara.
- ⁷⁴ For some interesting current scholarly research on these issues see Jorge Ferrer and Jacob Sherman, *The Participatory Turn: Spirituality, Mysticism, and Religious Studies* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2009). In it they describe the 'participatory turn' as "a pluralistic vision of spirituality that accepts the formative role of contextual and linguistic factors in religious phenomena, while simultaneously recognizing the importance, and at times even centrality, of nonlinguistic variables (e.g. somatic, imaginal, energetic, contemplative, and so on) in shaping religious experiences and meanings, and affirming the ontological value and creative impact of spiritual worlds and realities. ... [T]he participatory turn argues for an *enactive* understanding of the sacred, seeking to approach religious phenomena, experiences, and insights as cocreated events. ... [W]e are advancing the admittedly bold hypothesis that religious worlds and phenomena, such as the Kabbalistic four realms, the various Buddhist cosmologies, or Teresa's seven mansions, come into existence out of a process of participatory cocreation between human multidimensional cognition and the generative force of life and / or spirit."
- ⁷⁵ Berdyaev, *Destiny of Man*, 3, 12.
- ⁷⁶ Beverly Lanzetta, "The Mystical Basis of Panikkar's Thought", in *The Intercultural Challenge of Raimon Panikkar*, ed. by Joseph Prabhu (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1996), 94.
- ⁷⁷ Here I refer to the Zen master Bankei's notion of the "perfectly functioning Buddha-mind." See Bankei, *Bankei Zen*, ed. Peter Haskel and Yoshito Hakeda (New York: Grove Press, 1984).
- ⁷⁸ Raimon Panikkar, *Invisible Harmony: Essays on Contemplation and Responsibility* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995), 178. See endnotes 30, 31 for Heraclitus translation citation, 206.
- ⁷⁹ Cecil Collins, *Vision of the Fool*, Enlarged Edition, ed. by Brian Keeble (London: Golgonooza Press, 2002), 94, 116, 124.
- ⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 145-146.
- ⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 148, 156-157.