In the preceding issue of this journal, this reviewer presented an article on interreligious dialogue, based on Nostra Aetate and on Lonergan's insights into the emerging religious consciousness of our times.¹ It concluded with a nine-point hypothesis that later looked more like an extremely "desperate act of hope," if we may so describe the contradictory position of one hoping against hope, aware that certain realities are hopelessly hard. It does not show how the hypothesis may be empirically verified, and admittedly, it now appears to be "out of touch with hard realities," as pointed out by a perceptive reader.

Is there a remedy? If there is, it will require explicitating the "hard realities" that seem to hinder the on-going dialogue among world religions, at least insofar as these realities are being reported in current literature. With this in mind, a random search is made, and six books published recently are studied here: one includes reflections about Islam, another about Buddhism, a third about deviant cults, a fourth about a healing sect, a fifth about church persecution, and a sixth about the nature and stages of Prayer. For the present, their relevance to the dialogue is somewhat oblique. This is presented here as a six-part review article. The reviewer hopes that other researchers will read these and similar books and thus contribute constructively to the study.


¹ Landas 4 (Jan. 1990) 3-14.


_Mertoniana_ (rather than _Mertonia_ as appears on p. viii) would be an apt name for the growing collection of publications by and about this versatile Trappist monk. The popularity of Merton’s writings is indicative of the ease with which many readers readily identify with him. His set of meanings and values spontaneously evokes theirs, and this common set constitutes a veritable community that is increasing in constituency.

Why is this so? One answer points to the acuity of his perceptions and the refinement with which he communicates them in this two-part book. The first part is a collection of miscellaneous impressions, some poetic, others as prosaic as business letters. The second part is a series of systematic compositions of spiritual insights packaged for delivery in the form of conferences to various groups. This bipartite format adopted by the editor implies a method behind Merton’s meditative materials, and the method may well be explicititated.

A gifted poet, Merton is aware that poetry is the religious language _par excellence_. Just as a painter unceasingly experiments with colors in various combinations, or as a musician keeps testing chord-cadences in all their possible sequences, so too does Merton, in Part One of the book, jot down in his Alaskan journal various phrases, incomplete sentences or longer passages from something that he would be reading at odd moments of his itinerary. Examples are: “Light snow in Anchorage on the last day of September.”
"Lake Aleknagik speaks to me. A chain of lakes far from everything. Is this it?" "[The six-year old Rama Krishna] saw a beautiful storm cloud, and a flight of snow white cranes passing in front of it, above him. He lost consciousness and fell into a faint at the beauty of it. . . ." "A volcano to which one speaks with reverence . . ." The sequence in which these well up in his consciousness is as non-systematic as the rise and fall of dream images. Apparently directionless, they are actually being filed away in his memory, waiting for creative moments of contemplative rearrangement, whether in eremitical solitude or while sharing them with other contemplative souls in the form, for example, of his eight conferences in Part Two.

Unlike Part One, Part Two is rather prosaic, even analytical at times, but in a chatty and personal way. This is the style that would be expected by the sisters and priests who requested conferences of him when they learned that he was passing through. These are generally about prayer in its many existential aspects, including the prayer of religious communities concerned with the problems of the underprivileged. Merton's approach tries to relate prayer with power politics. These religious activists feel the need of insights that emerge from Merton's eremitical solitude, in order to see the forest despite the tangled trees that sometimes darken their vision.

 Readers may wish to experience for themselves this reviewer's fascination upon reflecting on the seventh conference, particularly about Sufism, as the core insight of this book. According to Merton, the Sufist sees man as a "secret of God," that is, as God's act of knowing that is too deep for human understanding, such that the heart alone, and not the mind, can reach out to Him in prayer. We reproduce Merton's own statements:

For example, Sufism looks at man as a heart and a spirit and as a secret, and the secret is the deepest part. The secret of man is God's secret; therefore, it is in God.

. . . The Sufis have a way of learning to pray so that you are really praying in the heart, from the heart. . .

This condensed description may or may not conform exactly to the historical reality of Sufism. But it suggests the nature of the
secret hunger in the heart of Merton and of many less contemplative activists, the secret hunger that drove Merton through Alaska to Asia and to his death, the secret hunger that drives many hearts to a life-and-death struggle for the radical changes conducive to the spiritual growth of our planet, the hunger with which the planet, in some secret way, reaches up to God in prayer.

This book succeeds in articulating one response to global hunger. This may well be the central meaning of Mertoniana.

In a strange way, the secrecy motif indicated above evokes a resonant chord in The Silence of God considered by Pannikar as the Buddha’s answer to an inquiring mind. Pannikar’s philosophical reflections are very difficult to grasp and can be expected to remain controversial for a long time. The difficulties arise principally from the nature of the problem being confronted, namely, Buddhism as an “atheistic religion.” Difficulties multiply when terms defined by their usage in the western discursive mode are used to discuss oriental intuitions on ineffable matters. This very ineffability should doom the entire enterprise to failure and discourage lesser spirits. With admirable fortitude born of mystic concern, Pannikar pursues the inquiry in ten analytic chapters of which four are devoted to textual analysis.

The texts selected resemble Socratic question-and-answer dialogue between teacher and pupil, but radically differ from their hellenic counterpart in the repeated application of the negative particle on everything including itself. A non-mathematical mind can easily get lost in this complex network of negatives. Most readers will immediately give up trying to follow the verbal explanations, especially if they have already accepted the fact of ineffability — or more elegantly — cosmic silence.

How does this respond to the initial inquiry? It does not, except to show that it is vain to inquire, that the inquiring mind has yet to be liberated from the compulsion to inquire, and that if such liberation were attainable in reality, it could, rightly or wrongly, be named “atheistic religion.”

Thus, the value of this atheistic religion in the context of interreligious dialogue is to liberate worship from philosophical inquiry, and to relativize theological pluralism, insofar as this is conditioned by cultural pluralism. Could this be what, among other things, Pannikar is trying to say in his six other chapters? If so,
this looks like a point of intersection with what Merton sees in the 
Sufist formula that "the secret of man is God’s secret." Merton 
and Pannikar are probably meditating on the same reality, called 
"God’s secret" by one and "God’s silence" by the other. And this 
may well be the point of intersection of world religions including 
Christianity.

Such a consensus can be expected to shift the direction of 
philosophical inquiry into the human languages that, by a process 
of anguished approximation, attempt to describe God’s silence and 
God’s secret. All languages, like everything human, undergo birth, 
growth, decline and death. Even translations of dead languages 
into a living language undergo this cycle. Thus, the revision of 
translations of the Sanskrit, Torah, Qur’ân, Gospels, apostolic let-
ters and patristic counsels, is a never-ending process and always 
short of fully revealing God’s secret.

What is true of philosophical inquiries in world religions is also 
true of Catholic theologies. Both Merton and Pannikar unequivo-
cally affirm their evangelical sources as being as normative as Nos-
stra Aetate affirms them to be. Both are exceptionally well-informed 
about the theological researches in Christian circles. Yet both are 
in some agony about the fruits of these researches. Pannikar’s 
agony can be surmised in the titles contained in his twenty-three 
pages of heavy bibliography. Merton’s agony is well-known in his 
restless diggings into the centuries-old patristic literature in the 
Gethsemane library, and later in his following the spirit into desert 
solitude, into the Alaskan wilderness and into his death in Asia. He 
died with his agony unallayed, his hunger unsatisfied.

If Christian theologies are found to be so unsatisfactory to such 
diligent scholars, how satisfactory would they be to the vast ma-
majority of Catholic believers, whose only spiritual fare is popular 
piety? Pope Paul VI describes popular piety as so rich and yet so 
vulnerable.² This vulnerability has become manifest in the world-
wide phenomenon of pseudo-religious or quasi-religious groups 
that have emerged in the past decade. To this phenomenon, LeBar 
addresses his book, Cults, Sects and the New Age.

LeBar and his three colleagues reflect increasing concern about 
diminishing membership in mainline churches including Roman

2. Evangelii Nuntiandi, no. 48.
Catholicism, and particularly in large American dioceses, due to the emergence of cults, sects and new religious movements. Enumerated among these are groups advocating Biblical Fundamentalism, Scientology, The Way International, Moon’s Unification Movement, World-wide Church, Divine Light Mission, Hare Krishna, Eckankar, Erhart Seminars Training, Leuken’s Bayside Movement, Silva Mind Control, Transcendental Meditation, Satanism, witchcraft, etc.

In twelve separate but overlapping chapters, the task of disseminating information is undertaken as the main remedy against the confusion generated by these groups. To these are added twelve appendices documenting diocesan statements about these groups in general or about one or another in particular. An honest examination of collective conscience also reveals shortcomings in Catholic formation and evokes a search for adequate remedies. Interviews with ex-cultists reveal psychic wounds resulting from their cult experience and in many cases the wounds are not healed until after long-term psychotherapy.

Appendix IX (pp. 229-54) deserves special attention. It carefully systematizes responses to a questionnaire of February 1984 received by Episcopal Conferences and regional bodies on all continents, detailing reasons for the spread of deviant cults and the pastoral challenges and approaches evoked by these.

This book is highly recommended to church workers in the Philippines, especially in large urban areas where subsidized American fads are easily spread. Furthermore, from the features of the imported variety, indigenous cultists rapidly learn new techniques for intensifying langkap control: inherited from pre-Christian babaylans are home-grown skills in going into a trance and delivering messages allegedly from spirits, and these skills strengthen the thought control of cult leaders over their followers. The followers are induced to involve themselves in activities that are overtly religious but covertly directed to hidden agenda, some financial, some politically partisan, and some downright corrupt. The followers eventually become emotionally addicted to these messages issuing from the lips of their leaders until they begin to lose the

freedom to make their own decisions.

The Philippine clergy will also greatly benefit from LeBar’s descriptions of the systematic way in which the archdioceses of New York and Philadelphia carried out their in-depth researches into the pastoral care of disillusioned ex-cultists. In the Manila archdiocese alone, there are many Catholics who, having spent months or years blindly following a Salve Carreon or a Gloria Flordeliza or a Tomasa Mabasa, gradually realized that their leader was neither infallible nor impeccable, that there are grounds for dark suspicions about the leader’s life, that efforts to verify suspicions are met with threats of legalistic harassment or physical violence. In their frustration, confusion and shattering disappointment, some seek remedy in the sacrament of reconciliation, only to find that some confessors are not too well-informed either about the Ingkong or the Nonoy or the Apo, names with which they used to address the divinity allegedly possessing the cult-leader.

In contrast to these instances of spiritistic perversions, a book entitled Espiritista describes a healing sect known as the Union Espiritista Christiana de Filipinas, from the point of view of an American researcher Ms. H. Wendey Joy. Wendey is a world traveler trying to understand the various manifestations of spiritual consciousness among peoples as far away from her California home as the Himalayas. In 1973, she came to the Philippines to explore the activities of psychic surgeons. Her friendly nature led her to many intimate acquaintances among the Espiritistas, especially Lily Miguel of Nueva Viscaya, with whom she formed a deep and lasting friendship.

In twenty-three warmly vibrant chapters, Wendey narrates her exciting experiences while travelling with Lily and her friends on healing missions in the hinterlands of Northern Luzon. Eager to have links of personal friendship with this healing team and deeply impressed with their involvement with suffering people, she tried and eventually succeeded in healing people with arthritis, headaches, nausea and heart problems, by prayerfully laying hands on them. However, she could not exorcize a possessed boy. Perhaps the reason, she thought, was that she had not been fasting. Her friends gave her all the encouragement she wanted. They assured
her that her successes as a healer were very important to her journalistic mission, which they agreed was her primary mission.

A gifted writer, she is very honest and convincing about her emotional attachments. But she does not conceal her intellectual detachment as evidenced by the quotation marks on the capitalized word "Spirit" referring to the source of messages coming from the mouth of Lily when in a trance. Indeed this delicate conflict between her affectionate heart and her detached mind may have been the reality, symbolized by "Satan," that delayed her from writing the concluding chapter. Perhaps she can objectify this conflict and exorcize away its adverse effects if she attends to Lonergan's distinction between the "intellectual pattern" and the "dramatic pattern" of experience.\(^4\) The objectification can lead to a skill in moving from one pattern to the other consciously and intentionally. In her dedication to her journalistic mission, such a skill will surely be helpful as she begins her "new journey" towards discernment of spirits. This gift of discernment is in such great need today.

Discernment reveals that fallen human nature is presently in danger of aggravating its fall. For now it is trying to raise itself through a secularist technology. Although this technology professes impartiality regarding different religions, it is itself a quasi-religion insofar as it demands idolatrous submission to the Golden Calf of today, the transnational oligarchies and their superpower militarism. It claims monopoly of the power to save its adherents from macroeconomic chaos. It maintains its security through deep penetration of the top financial and military institutions and by promoting Low Intensity Conflicts among potential rivals especially religious institutions. One phase of this operation is being tested in the Kidapawan diocese. This is analyzed in a documentary compilation entitled Church Persecution: A Test Case: Kidapawan Diocese, edited by P. Geremia.

The book consists of two parts and one appendix. Part I introduces the reader to the location of the Kidapawan diocese and to its population of Christians, Muslims, Ilagas, Tadtad, Landasan, Pulahan, Putihan, Ituman and other ethno-religious groups. Then it gives details of bloodbaths, complete with names and dates of

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killings and kidnappings. Some of these have appeared piecemeal in the media, including the case of Fr. Tullio Favali, PIME, but their integrated compilation here reveals with startling clarity a pattern that can only come from a policy of Low Intensity Conflicts decreed in high places. Part II documents the judicial sentence in the Favali case and the dismissal of false charges of kidnapping and rape against priests, sisters and lay people. The appendix narrates similar patterns of church persecution outside Kidapawan diocese. (If this book had come out a year later, it could have included reflections, for example, on the brutal martyrdom of the six Jesuit priests and their two lay helpers in El Salvador, as another instance of a global policy of Low Intensity Conflicts.) These are very hard realities that militate against any basis for hoping for interreligious convergence, as though heaven itself has closed its doors to such a hope.

And yet hope exists. A loving heart that shuns despair and an inquiring mind unbiased by restrictions might hear rumors of interreligious convergence upon reading Lozano’s book about the nature and stages of prayer in Prayer Even When the Door Seems Closed. Its ten chapters contain the substance of the classical writings of Teresa of Jesus, John of the Cross and other writers of Christian mysticism, and attempt to present it in a style that conforms to modern journalistic norms. The attempt is generally successful. (However the sensitivity for gender in modern English journalism regarding personal pronouns like “him or her,” “he or she,” “himself or herself,” can sometimes distract readers of either sex when these pronouns occur frequently in a given paragraph.)

The contents of the ten chapters will not be summarized here since they hew closely to the tradition of classical writers. It is good to observe how classical terms are successfully translated by Lozano into the familiar language of daily life, easily intelligible to readers immersed in this sinful world, especially readers trying to understand current events in their spiritual context. Augustinian, Benedictine, Carmelite, Cistercian, Dominican, Franciscan and Jesuit spiritualities, formerly seen only in clumsy transliterations of nearly dead languages, come alive in Lozano’s conversational prose. For Lozano vividly relates the biblical prayer “in the blood of Christ” (pp. 49-52) to the blood-soaked terrain of El Salvador,
Russia and the Philippines, in a style that makes the dynamics of prayer very much alive.

Of special relevance to the topic of interreligious dialogue are two passages in the last two chapters:

In this transcending of everything, and in the first place of their very selves so that they may be immersed in the divine mystery, both Christian and Muslim mystics seem, although with essential difference, to agree with the masters of Buddhism. A Renaissance Christian master little-cited today, the Benedictine abbott of Liesse, Louis de Blois (Bloisius), described the situation of all mystics quite well (although he was speaking only about Christians) when he wrote: 'Upon entering the desert of divinity, the soul finds itself happily lost' (p. 152, emphasis added).

... Christian tradition, inspired by the Song of Songs, has called this union a 'marriage', an image which the Spirit herself uses to describe God's covenant with Israel. It should be noted that the Muslim mystics also speak of the union between lover and beloved. This is because, in the view born of biblical and Islamic traditions (as opposed to the self-annulling ideal of Buddhism), the created being does not disappear even in this last degree of union (p. 161).

These two excerpts indicate, first, how Buddhism is similar to Christianity and Islam, and second, how it differs from the other two. There is difference in the type of union between lover and beloved: annihilation in Buddhism and non-annihilation in the other two. More important than this difference is the similarity that emphasizes the reality of union, of being "happily lost" in the "desert of divinity." Also emphasized is the more relevant fact that this situation is common to all mystics, whether Buddhist or Christian or Muslim.

From this insight of Lozano, one may deduce that interreligious dialogue, although difficult for dialogists who have not yet entered into the last stage of mystic union, can become spontaneous when the dialogists have transcended human concepts and affects in the "desert of divinity." One wonders whether this was the unverbalized intent of the 1986 meeting at Assisi: possibly, the dialogists simply intended to be in a meditative state of consciousness while present to each other in the same spatio-temporal dimension. Indeed, can mystics dialogue in any other way?

This deduction from Lozano may be equivalent to Lonergan's
description of a process that starts with the infant’s world of immediacy, continues to the adult’s world where meanings are objectified, and finally ends in a withdrawal from objectification and in a mediated return to immediacy in a prayerful mystic’s cloud of unknowing. Here, words are useless.

Is it possible to have dialogue without words? To this question, any answer is bound to touch upon that hardest reality of all interreligious dialogue. Lozano initially wanted to write this book with the intention of “speaking heart to heart” (p. 2). This was also Lonergan’s concern about a carrier of meaning that transcends linguistic meanings and to which he has given the name of “incarnate meaning.” Such a meaning can only be communicated when heart speaks to heart. Was heart struggling to speak to heart in the Assisi meeting of 1986? Or in the interreligious consultation at Singapore in 1987? Or at Taipei in 1988? And why is interreligious dialogue now said to be “gasping for breath”? Is it because the dialogue is not heart to heart but merely mind to mind? If so, is it too unrealistic to hope against hope that, with active human cooperation with and passive abandonment to God’s mercy, this just might change?

6. Method, 73.
7. FABC Papers, No. 49, pp. 32-52.