

A MEETING OF HEARTS

Review of

ENCOUNTER: THOMAS MERTON & D. T. SUZUKI

Edited with an Introduction by Robert E. Daggy

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Reviewed by **Chalmers MacCormick**

Of all the friendships formed in the last decade of Thomas Merton's life, the one with Daisetz Teitaro Suzuki was surely one of the two or three most important. The importance to Merton himself on a personal level is underscored by one of his journal entries made just after his two visits with his 94 year old friend at Columbia University in June 1964, during Suzuki's final trip to the United States. "For once in a long time," Merton wrote, "I felt as if I had spent a few moments with my own family It was rather like one of the visits with the Hammers." What began, then, in March 1959, on Merton's initiative, as an exchange of ideas, progressively deepened — thanks especially to the conversations in New York — into a meeting of hearts. Symptomatic of the deepening was the change that then occurred in the form of personal address: for Merton "Dr. Suzuki" became "Daisetz-san."

What was of singular importance to Merton is also of great importance to his readers, and it is therefore most fitting that the known written record of the collaboration and friendship is here made available to the public. A work in four main parts, its special merit is also four-fold.

First, the greater part of the book consists of all the letters between Merton and Suzuki that are jointly owned by the University of Kentucky and Bellarmine College — which is to say, all of the Merton-Suzuki correspondence known, at the time of publication, to be extant. The book is thus an improvement on the excellent set of letters in *The Hidden Ground of Love: The Letters of Thomas Merton on Religious Experience and Social Concerns* (William H. Shannon, ed.; 1985) in that *Hidden Ground* contains only the letters from Merton to Suzuki, whereas this newer volume contains Suzuki's replies as well.

□ **Chalmers MacCormick** is Professor of Religion at Wells College in Aurora, New York. He is the author of "The Zen Catholicism of Thomas Merton," *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 9 (Fall 1972): pp. 802-818, and "A Critical View of Solitude in Thomas Merton's Life and Thought," in *The Message of Thomas Merton*; ed. Brother Patrick Hart (Kalamazoo, Michigan: Cistercian Publications, 1981): pp. 115-128. He is a frequent reviewer of books by and about Merton, particularly in *Choice* where he most recently reviewed Anne E. Carr's *A Search for Wisdom and Spirit: Thomas Merton's Theology of the Self*.

Second, included here are first-hand accounts by Merton of his trip to New York and his meetings with Suzuki. The greater portion of these accounts is from the diary recently published as *A Vow of Conversation: Journals, 1964-1965* (Naomi Burton Stone, ed.; 1988). However, *Encounter* additionally includes a fairly long set of hitherto unpublished notes made by Merton on June 15 and 16, 1964. These notes constitute approximately one-third of the journal-section of the volume under review and, despite some overlap with *Vow*, significantly augment the latter.

Third, the work has been superbly edited. Robert Daggy has provided both a brief, apt introduction explaining how the book came to be and an abundant, likewise apt, series of bibliographical and explanatory notes.

Finally, the book has been very attractively printed. The Larkspur Press has used two types of lettering: Joseph Blumenthal's Emerson and Victor Hammer's American Uncial. The appearance of the finished product well befits its content.

In sum, *Encounter* is an excellent addition to the Merton corpus. More particularly, it is an essential complement to Merton's essay, "D. T. Suzuki: The Man and His Work" and "Wisdom in Emptiness: A Dialogue by D. T. Suzuki and Thomas Merton," both of which are included in Merton's *Zen and the Birds of Appetite* (1968).

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