

friend's own hermitage home, where she read aloud the very passage on the awakening valley "that had brought me to him" for the first time (182) (c. 11: "The Sight of the Harbor" [165-84]).

Like any, or all, of us, Scott doesn't inevitably hit all the right notes, or inevitably doesn't hit all the right notes. In particular, one might question whether her discussion of Merton's prayer in chapter 8 reflects a sufficiently broad and deep acquaintance with this dimension of his life. Drawing on various journal passages in which the monk laments his shortcomings in prayer, she uncharacteristically lectures him on the subject, emphasizing his failure to "soar," his "woefully ineffective" "wing-flapping" (124), comparing him, rather incongruously, to the brilliant but overly bookish Hermione of the Harry Potter series, who needs to get in better touch with her intuitive side (see 121). Would her evaluation have been different, at least more nuanced, if she had taken into account the famous description of his prayer that Merton wrote to his Pakistani friend Abdul Aziz in 1966,² or his frequent expression of his preference for the desert, for emptiness, darkness, naked faith, the void, as the true "climate" of contemplative prayer? One can at least say that this chapter is more valuable for what it reveals about Scott's own vibrant prayer life than for what it claims about Merton's.

Even here, however, this bold willingness to engage in creative dialogue with Merton on matters that really do matter, to respond honestly and thoughtfully to his ideas and experiences, and articulate her own in the process, makes *The Seeker and the Monk* a refreshing, enjoyable, indeed unique contribution to the vast secondary literature on Thomas Merton, so recognized by the International Thomas Merton Society's 2021 "Louie" award for a work that "has bought provocative insight and fresh direction to Merton studies." The opportunity to listen in on these "everyday conversations," to share vicariously in this spiritual and spirited exchange, is, one can confidently state, far from being an everyday occurrence.

Patrick F. O'Connell

RAAB, Joseph Quinn, *Opening New Horizons: Seeds of a Theology of Religious Pluralism in Thomas Merton's Dialogue with D. T. Suzuki* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2021), pp. xvii, 163. ISBN: 978-1-7252-7936-0 (paper) \$23.00.

When I read a film review, I don't want the reviewer to reveal the entire plot of the movie. That would ruin the fun. I want to know just enough

2. Thomas Merton, *The Hidden Ground of Love: Letters on Religious Experience and Social Concerns*, ed. William H. Shannon (New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 1985) 63-64.

of the plot to know whether it interests me. Beyond the general premise, what I really want to know from the review is if this film is worth seeing. Is it worth my time? In this case, I can tell you that Joseph Quinn Raab's book *Opening New Horizons: Seeds of a Theology of Religious Pluralism in Thomas Merton's Dialogue with D. T. Suzuki* is absolutely worth your time. It is a great book. For fans of the Merton corpus, it is a page turner. I will not spoil the fun by revealing every plot twist, but in what follows I will provide some highlights of the argument.

There are so many interesting insights into Merton's work in this book that it can sometimes be difficult to see the forest for all the trees. The book covers a lot of ground. To help orient the reader, the author pinpoints his argument in the subtitle and then outlines this argument in the Introduction. The issue he sets out to address is how Catholic theology should address the reality of religious pluralism. If non-Christians can be saved, how should Christians understand the role played by their religious traditions in their salvation? Do their traditions play a positive role, or are they saved in spite of them? Through all of its twists and turns, Raab's book gleans insights from Merton's engagement with D. T. Suzuki (and others) on how to address these delicate theological questions.

Chapter one (13-36) begins the exploration of Merton's engagement with religious pluralism with nine "snapshots" or moments in his career. These incidents illustrate ways in which he grew over the years, from his understanding of God at Columbia through the reading of Gilson, to his encounter with Eastern religions via the Hindu monk Brahmachari, to his struggle to tame his public or social self while in the monastery. The vignettes highlight Merton's iconoclastic spirit. While not central to the argument of the book, the first chapter provides an interesting review of familiar episodes as well as a few encounters that may be new even to experienced readers of Merton.

Chapter two (37-50) addresses Merton's approach to the interpretation of scripture and Christian dogma. Raab notes that Merton was both firmly committed to the truth of Christian doctrine and found genuine knowledge of God among people of other faiths. These commitments allowed him to be patient and flexible when differences arose with his dialogue partners, which they inevitably did.

The argument builds momentum as the reader progresses through the book. It picks up steam in chapter three (51-74). Here Raab recounts in detail Merton's engagement with D. T. Suzuki from 1959 until Suzuki's death in 1966. The chapter records key moments in their correspondence, beginning with Merton's request for Suzuki to write a preface to *Wisdom of the Desert*, Merton's collection of sayings of the Christian desert

monks, because Merton sensed in the sayings a resonance with the koans of the Chinese Chan masters. Suzuki agreed. As their dialogue developed, the discussion moved beyond the desert monks to a deeper encounter between Zen and contemplative Christianity. This dialogue eventually was published as “Wisdom in Emptiness” in Merton’s *Zen and the Birds of Appetite*.¹ One of Suzuki’s concerns is to clarify a Western misunderstanding of Zen. He insists that Zen does not advocate antinomian moral relativism. Merton caused tension in the dialogue when he suggested “that Zen stops at the intermediary end of the recovery of paradise in ‘emptiness’ while the Christian journey anticipates a further ultimate end which is not purity of heart but heaven itself” (66). The chapter ends with an account of Merton’s meeting with Suzuki in New York in 1964.

While chapter three confines itself to a report of the published dialogue between Suzuki and Merton, chapter four (75-90) delivers an analysis and interpretation of it. In addition to a discussion of their collaborative essay “Wisdom in Emptiness,” chapter four adds the perspective of a 1964 Merton piece titled “The Zen Revival” (an expanded version of which later appeared as the opening chapter of *Mystics and Zen Masters*²). Raab suggests this later essay shows Merton’s development through the use of new terms that affirm “mutual understanding” between the two traditions. Here, instead of looking at the two traditions through the distinction between the natural and the supernatural, Merton explores an understanding of what it means to be a “person” that is in contrast to an ego-self which “possesses” a separate identity. Instead of a dualistic division between subject and object, in compatibility with Zen Merton outlines a view of the emptiness of the self, a “self” not separate from the absolute. Merton uses Paul’s statement in Galatians 2:20 (“it is no longer I who live, but it is Christ who lives in me”) to support his articulation of the inseparable nature of the genuine person’s relationship to Christ (see 89).

In chapters five through seven, Raab shifts his attention from a discussion of the specific content of the Merton/Suzuki dialogue to his larger argument concerning a theology of religious pluralism that he briefly sketches in the Introduction. In chapter five (91-108), he explores Merton’s “enduring commitment to Christ as the fullness of divine revelation while still affirming *genuine knowledge* of God in other religious traditions” (91). Here Raab analyzes how Merton is able to strike this balance through a sophisticated use of Bernard Lonergan’s three distinct yet related

1. Thomas Merton, *Zen and the Birds of Appetite* (New York: New Directions, 1968) 99-138.

2. Thomas Merton, *Mystics and Zen Masters* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1967) 3-44.

meanings of the word “God.” Merton was critical of triumphalism, but Raab strongly insists that Merton’s work affirms that the “rightful role of the Christian contemplative in the dialogue is to learn from the other, to discover and affirm the light of God in all its various manifestations, and to continually *point to Christ* crucified and risen as the answer to the profound questions raised by these traditions” (105-106). Chapter six (109-23) examines Merton’s discussion of the theme of the human person in light of the Buddhist doctrine of *anatman*. In his writings on Zen, Merton wrestles with how to articulate his affirmation of the truth of both *anatman* and the Christian doctrine of *theosis*. To help him avoid the dualism of body/soul or matter/spirit distinctions in his view of the person, Merton turned to Trinitarian theology. Analogous to the three persons of the Trinity, for him what makes a person a person is his or her relationships both interpersonal and with all of creation. Chapter seven (124-50) moves beyond the dialogue with Suzuki first to an exploration of his account in the *Asian Journal* of his experience at Polonnaruwa,³ which turned out to be the climax of his pilgrimage to Asia. Here Raab explores the meaning of the Buddhist terms *Madhyamika* and *Dharmakaya* that Merton uses in his journal to describe his experience (see 129-33). The chapter then engages in a fascinating comparison of Merton’s practice of dialogue with the 2000 Vatican document *Dominus Iesus* (see 139-46). Though Raab thinks Merton would raise an objection to one reading of one particular issue in the document, this reviewer was surprised to discover how complementary the two are. Finally, the chapter and the book close by bringing together the theological argument about religious pluralism that the author outlines in the Introduction. In short, Raab interprets Merton’s interreligious work to affirm that other religions can indeed serve a positive role in God’s universal plan for humanity and that Christian theology should understand this role to occur through the universal presence of Christ at work in them, though known by other names.

I highly recommend this book. It exhibits a deep familiarity with the Merton corpus and uses this vast knowledge to shed light on the complex issue of how Catholic theology should interpret the religious pluralism of our world today. An additional strength of the book is the inclusion of photographs of Merton with several of his Buddhist interlocutors, including D. T. Suzuki, Thich Nhat Hanh, the Dalai Lama and Chatral Rinpoche. Reading this carefully argued book, I received an appreciation for Merton’s orthodox rootedness in Christian doctrine, his desire to reach across religious boundaries because of the enrichment he found there, and

3. Thomas Merton, *The Asian Journal*, ed. Naomi Burton Stone, Brother Patrick Hart and James Laughlin (New York: New Directions, 1973) 231-36.

his tireless efforts to deepen his own understanding so he could find new language to express shared meanings with his dialogue partners.

Chad Thralls

DEKAR, Paul R., *Thomas Merton: God's Messenger on the Road towards a New World* (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2021), pp. xxxii, 152. ISBN: 978-1-5326-7083-1 (paper) \$24.00.

“The world is not okay” (131). This stark statement near the conclusion of Paul Dekar’s book *Thomas Merton: God’s Messenger on the Road towards a New World* states plainly what many of us feel as we witness the ongoing war in Ukraine, the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic, heightened political polarization and the specter of the climate crisis. We, like Merton, are faced with a number of complex global challenges, but perhaps most challenging is the call to Christian hope in a world beset with suffering. Dekar’s conclusion reflects the tenor of his book, in that he does not shy away from recognizing the challenges confronting us, but he is skilled in bringing together spiritual and contemplative resources to energize our efforts to meet these challenges. His partner in this task is Thomas Merton, although his book helpfully weaves in the wisdom of a number of other figures, from Gandhi and Thich Nhat Hanh to Ernesto Cardenal and August Thompson. Further, he draws on the scholarship of a plethora of Merton scholars – the footnotes serve as a rich set of recommendations for further reading.

Oriented around the prophetic call in Micah to “act justly and to love kindness and to walk humbly with your God” (6:8), Dekar’s first three sections illustrate how Merton’s life serves as a witness to this prophetic call and further, how his example can be instructive for us as we contend with contemporary challenges. The first, “Doing Justice” (1-32), focuses first on Merton’s perspective on technology and second on his correspondence with three Black civil rights activists. The second, “Loving Kindness” (33-49), tracks Merton’s experience of the “wilderness of compassion” (37) and his connection to indigenous spirituality. The third, “Walking Humbly” (51-75), focuses on the power of silence in peace activism and contemplation and the concept of divinization in Merton’s writings. While some chapters tread familiar ground for avid readers of Merton, Dekar’s descriptions of his own initial encounters with Merton’s writing and his connections of his own experiences of retreat, contemplation and activism to Merton’s wisdom help enliven the content as it takes on new expression in the author’s own experiences.

In the fourth section (77-116), Dekar turns to Merton’s habit of