Eros as Koan: Thomas Merton, Monastic Life, Zen and M.

By **David Orberson**

Thomas Merton did a great deal to stoke Western interest in Eastern religions and dialogue between Christian and Buddhist traditions. In the 1960s he read and wrote extensively about Eastern religions, and about Zen in particular. By coincidence, during this time Merton began a romantic relationship with a young nursing student. As a priest and monk this was in direct violation of his monastic vows. Yet for several months, Merton's personal journals show he found ways to reconcile and justify this apparent contradiction to himself. A great deal has been written about the influence that Zen had on Merton's poetry, art and photography. Interestingly, Merton's journals also show that he used Zen concepts, at least as he understood and applied them, to help justify and rationalize his chosen life as a monk and this relationship. In this essay I examine how this occurred and towards this end examine Merton's understanding of Zen as well as the relationship in question. Finally, with that foundation laid I am then able to trace how Merton used the Zen concepts of paradox, formlessness and especially the collapse of dualism to justify his actions.

Merton and Eastern Religions

Before focusing on Merton's understanding of Eastern religions it is important first to examine his primary source for Zen and Buddhism. Merton is quite explicit in stating that his two biggest influences were Dr. John Wu[1] and D. T. Suzuki. In particular, Merton is unabashed in his admiration for Suzuki, comparing him to Einstein and Gandhi (see *ZBA* 59). The two corresponded between 1959 and 1965[2] and even had an opportunity to meet in June 1964.[3] Merton also makes reference to the specific works by Wu and Suzuki that he was reading, so it is possible to trace his ideas about Zen back to its primary sources. Of particular interest for this project one can see how Merton's notion of non-dualism was influenced by the writing of Wu and Suzuki. Both wrote that non-dualism was an important element of Zen. As Wu writes, "The Buddhanature is beyond permanent and impermanent, beyond good and evil, beyond content and form. This is . . . the 'essential non-duality of the Buddhanature.'"[4] Suzuki also writes a great deal about Zen's non-dual nature. One typical passage embodies his teaching when he writes:

> "Ignorance" is another name for logical dualism. White is snow and black is the Raven. But these things belong to the world and its ignorant way of talking. If we want to get to the very truth of things, we must see them from the point where this world has not yet been created, where the consciousness

David Orberson is a recent graduate of the Ph.D. program at the University of Louisville, where his dissertation focused on Thomas Merton's response to the problem of evil and the influence of Zen on this issue in the last years of his life. He earned a Master of Theological Studies from the St. Meinrad School of Theology and has been teaching theology part-time at Bellarmine University since 2007. In addition to his academic interests, he has worked in the areas of insurance and risk management for the last 25 years, and is currently Senior Director of Risk Management for Papa John's International. An ITMS member since 2014, he is the recently elected ITMS Treasurer (2017-2019).

David Orberson

> of this and that has not yet been awakened and where the mind is absorbed in its own identity, that is, in its serenity and emptiness. This is the world of negations but leading to a higher or absolute affirmation – an affirmation in the midst of negations. Snow is not white, the Raven is not black, yet each in itself is white or black. This is where our everyday language fails to convey the exact meaning as conveyed by Zen.[5]

As will be seen, this notion of non-duality is an important theme in Merton's understanding of Zen,[6] and is one of the main concepts he uses to justify his romantic relationship.

Merton wrote a number of books devoted to Eastern religions. This brief explication is not intended to be a complete summary of Merton's knowledge on the subject, but rather focuses on those elements that surface in his journals when he writes about his romantic relationship. In order to properly discuss Merton's understanding of Zen it is necessary to first briefly explore his understanding of Taoism, and specifically the kind espoused by Chuang Tzu. In his first book to explore Eastern thought, *The Way of Chuang Tzu*, Merton asserts that the true inheritors of the thought and spirit of Chuang Tzu are the Chinese Zen Buddhists of the T'ang period. He declares that there is no question that the kind of thought and culture represented by Chuang Tzu was the transformative force for turning the speculative kind of Indian Buddhism into the "humorous, iconoclastic, and totally practical kind of Buddhism that was to flourish in China and in Japan in the various schools of Zen. Zen throws light on Chuang Tzu, and Chuang Tzu throws light on Zen."[7] Merton also affirms that another key component of Chuang Tzu's thought is the notion of the complementarily of opposites. Life is in a constant state of development or process and all beings are in a state of flux. What is impossible today may become possible tomorrow. What is pleasant and good today may become evil tomorrow. What seems right from one point of view may seem, when seen from a different perspective, to be completely wrong. Seen in this way then, Tao "passes squarely through both 'Yes' and 'No,' 'I' and 'Not-I'" (*WCT* 30). The person who grasps the central pivot, as Merton describes it, of Tao, is able to appreciate the "yes" and "no" of a particular situation through their "alternating course around the circumference" of the issue (*WCT* 30). One must retain this perspective and clarity of judgment so that the "yes" of the situation stands in relation to the "no" of it. For example, happiness, when pushed to the extreme, becomes tragedy. Beauty, when overdone or excessive, can become ugliness. As will be shown, this theme of non-dualism played a dominant role in Merton's attempt to reconcile two seemingly contradictory elements of his life.

In his second book to explore Eastern religions, *Mystics and Zen Masters*, Merton states that Zen is not any kind of abstract metaphysic. Instead, it is a concrete and lived ontology which explains itself not as theoretical propositions but in acts that come out of a certain quality of consciousness and awareness. Zen therefore can only be judged by these acts and by this quality of consciousness. The paradoxes and "seemingly absurd propositions" that it sometimes makes have no logical meaning, "except in relation to an awareness that is unspoken and unspeakable."[8] Zen does not lend itself to logical analysis. He states that the first and most basic fact about Zen is its own abhorrence of any kind of dualistic division between matter and spirit. It is the ontological awareness of pure being beyond subject and object, and immediate grasp of being in its "suchness" and "thusness" (*MZM* 14). Here again, Merton highlights the non-dualistic and paradoxical elements of Zen.

In describing Zen insight Merton states that it consists in a direct grasp of "mind" or one's

"original face." This direct grasp implies a rejection of all conceptual methods or systems, so that one arrives at "mind" by "having no mind." Put differently, it is "being mind" instead of "having mind." Rather, it is recognition that the whole world is aware of itself in me, and that "I" am no longer my individual and limited self. As Merton describes it, one's apparent identity is to be sought not in any kind of separation from all that is, but instead as a oneness or convergence with all that is. This identity is not the denial of one's own personal reality. Instead it is its highest affirmation. It is a discovery of genuine identity in and with the One, and as Merton describes it, this is expressed in the paradox of Zen (see *MZM* 17-18).

Merton's third book focusing on Eastern thought, *Zen and the Birds of Appetite*, provides additional insights into his understanding of Zen. He states that Zen is not something that is grasped and comprehended by confining it to systems that try to structure an understanding of it. Instead he claims it is a "trans-cultural, trans-religious, trans-formed consciousness. It is therefore in a sense 'void'" (*ZBA* 4). Interestingly, Merton states that Zen can "shine through this or that system, religious or irreligious, just as light can shine through glass" (*ZBA* 4).

In describing Zen meditation, Merton states that Zen does not seek to explain the meaning of experience. Rather, it seeks for one to pay attention, become aware, and to be mindful of a certain kind of consciousness that is unaffected by emotional excitement or constrained by verbal formulas. Merton states that the true purpose of Zen is the awakening of a deep ontological awareness, or "wisdom-intuition," that is the ground of being of the one awakened. Since the Zen intuition seeks to awaken a direct metaphysical consciousness, beyond the empirical self, this awareness must be immediately present to itself and not mediated by any kind of conceptual or imaginative knowledge (see *ZBA* 48-49). This book also contains an insightful conversation, via correspondence, between D. T. Suzuki and Merton. It began in 1959 and was subsequently collected and published in this book (*ZBA* 99-138).[9] In this work Suzuki makes interesting parallels between the Zen and Christian understanding of innocence and knowledge. Suzuki states that the Christian understanding of these concepts is rooted in the story of the Adamic fall. In this context Suzuki uses the term "innocence" to be the state of mind that Adam and Eve lived in before they had eaten fruit from the tree of knowledge. In this way they lived with "eyes not opened, all naked, not ashamed, with no knowledge of good and evil" (*ZBA* 104). He uses the term "knowledge" on the other hand to denote everything that is opposite to innocence, "especially a pair of discriminating eyes widely opened to good and evil" (*ZBA* 104). Suzuki states that the "Man of Zen" strives to have his heart cleansed of all the impurities that emanate from this kind of knowledge. He states that when we return to a state of innocence anything that we do is considered good. Suzuki goes on to affirm that the Buddhist idea of *anabhoga-carya* (which he translates to mean effortlessness or no-striving) corresponds to innocence. When knowledge is awakened in the Garden of Eden the realization that there is a distinction between good and evil occurs. Suzuki goes on to say that this Christian idea of innocence is the moral interpretation of the Buddhist doctrine of emptiness. The Christian concept of knowledge on the other hand epistemologically corresponds to the Buddhist notion of ignorance (see *ZBA* 104-105).

In speaking of the concept of emptiness, Suzuki states that it is the mind that realizes the truth of Emptiness, and when this is accomplished it knows that there is no ego or self. He defines this as being the state of zero. It is out of this zero that all good is performed and all evil avoided. It

is an infinite storehouse of all possible good or values. He uses the following formula to illustrate this idea: zero = infinity and infinity = zero. This idea of emptiness is dynamic and is both being and becoming. It is knowledge and innocence. As Suzuki puts it, "The Knowledge to do good and not to do evil is not enough; it must come out of Innocence, where Innocence is Knowledge and Knowledge is Innocence" (*ZBA* 107).

Merton affirms that knowledge, in the sense that Suzuki has defined, results from alienation from our true selves. He states that the knowledge of good and evil begins with the attainment of temporal things for their own sake, an act which "makes the soul conscious of itself, and centers it on its own pleasure. It becomes aware of what is good and evil 'for itself'" (*ZBA* 127). Merton goes on to state that when this happens the soul enters a state of dualism that is now aware of both itself and God as separated beings or objects. The human soul now sees God as an object of desire or fear and it is no longer lost in God as a transcendent subject. Each act of self-affirmation further alienates one from God. Once again Merton continues to argue against dualism.

Finally, *The Asian Journal of Thomas Merton*, published after his death, chronicles his much anticipated trip to Asia to attend an inter-religious conference on monasticism. In notes he made in preparation for a conference and published here, Merton also writes about a now familiar theme – the collapse of dualism. In describing the work or discipline involved in monasticism, he states that it seeks to attain a kind of universality and wholeness that cannot be adequately described in terms of psychology. It seeks to transcend "the limits that separate subject from object and self from not-self."[10] Merton affirms that a variety of religious traditions can help one overcome dualism. As will be shown, Merton repeatedly returns to this notion of non-dualism to justify his monastic life and his romantic relationship.

The Relationship

Having summarized Merton's understanding of Zen it is now possible to examine his romantic relationship. On December 10, 1941 Thomas Merton entered the Trappist monastery of Our Lady of Gethsemani near Bardstown, Kentucky. After his novitiate he had made his initial monastic simple vows, three years later his solemn perpetual vows, and was ordained a priest in the spring of 1949. Included in the Benedictine vow of conversion of manners was the commitment to celibate chastity. In this context chastity is meant to be understood as excluding "the indulgence of the sexual appetite and . . . all voluntary carnal pleasures."[11] As will be seen, the romantic relationship Merton engaged in was at times in apparent conflict with both the spirit and letter of that vow.

At the age of 51 Thomas Merton was beginning to suffer from a variety of ailments, most notably problems with his neck. On March 23, 1966 he entered St. Joseph's Hospital, in nearby Louisville, Kentucky, to have surgery on a cervical spinal disc. On March 31, as he was still recuperating in the hospital, a new student nurse, 25 years old, came into his room to inform him that she had been appointed to his floor and would be giving him a sponge bath. They struck up a conversation and "M."[12] shared with him that she was Catholic, from Cincinnati and aware of who her patient was. In fact, she had read one of his earlier books, *The Sign of Jonas*. This initial meeting was also filled with a great deal of levity as they joked with each other and discussed a common interest in *Mad Magazine* and the "Peanuts" cartoon strip.[13] Over the next several days the two had more conversations and when Merton was discharged he left a letter for M. with instructions for how she could write to him. He also wrote that he was in need of friendship (see Mott 436). In describing

these initial meetings Merton wrote,

> I got a very friendly and devoted student nurse working on my compresses etc. and this livened things up considerably. In fact we were getting perhaps too friendly by the time she went off on her Easter vacation, but her affection – undisguised and frank – was an *enormous* help in bringing me back to life fast. . . . And I realized that though I am pretty indifferent to the society of my fellow monks . . . I do feel a deep emotional need for feminine companionship and love, and seeing that I must irrevocably live without it ended by tearing me up more than the operation itself.[14]

Merton returned to the monastery where he continued his convalescence and slowly resumed his routine. Several days after his return he was elated to receive a four-page letter from M. It included drawings of "Peanuts" characters that M. had done, one of which featured Snoopy with a thought balloon that said, "It's nice to have a friend" (Mott 437). Merton replied to her letter immediately and within days began calling her from phones on the monastery property that he could access and afforded some degree of privacy. After a couple of failed attempts Merton was able to reach her on the phone and they decided to meet in Louisville after one of his upcoming post-operative exams. More letters and calls followed and soon they had expressed their love for one another. What followed was a relationship of varying intensity between April and September 1966. While the majority of their relationship took place via correspondence and through telephone calls, they were able to meet a number of times. These meetings, however, presented a number of logistical hurdles that had to be overcome. Not only did the two live over an hour away from each other, Merton did not have access to a car (or drive for that matter) and because of the rules of his community, he could not simply come and go as he pleased. Despite these obstacles the two were able to meet on numerous occasions over the next several months, both in Louisville and even on the grounds of the monastery. Merton had many legitimate reasons to travel to Louisville, most related to medical treatment of some kind, as well as meetings with a psychiatrist and friend, Jim Wygal. Merton and M. would try to arrange their schedules so that once they were in the same city the two could meet. Some of these meetings were for lunch in downtown Louisville, having drinks in the Luau room at the airport, picnics in the park, etc.

According to his journals, during this time the two continued to profess a true and committed love to one another. However, while Merton makes a few mentions that the two of them discussed the possibility of marriage, and what that might entail, it seems clear it was never something that he seriously considered because of a number of factors. First, by this time in his life Merton had lived as a monk for 25 years. Despite periodic complaints about his abbot and the absurdities of living in community he was resigned to life as a Trappist and a priest. In addition he had only recently been allowed to begin living alone as a hermit on the monastery grounds. This was the achievement of a long-time goal. Writing in June of 1966 Merton states that despite his love for M., "I belong in the woods. There is no other way left for me" (*LL* 313). It is also worth pointing out that M. was engaged to a soldier who was serving in Vietnam during this time. While they did in fact profess deep love for each other, both Merton and M. had already made commitments that, if kept, would keep them apart (see *LL* 89).

Merton was able to keep their relationship a secret until, sometime in mid-June, another monk overheard a call he made to M. from the cellarer's office and informed the abbot. Merton and Dom James Fox had a contentious relationship[15] but Merton describes that upon finding out about this

relationship his abbot was "kind and tried to be understanding to some extent." However, as Merton points out, Dom James was clear that "his only solution was of course 'a complete break'" (*LL* 82). Merton was expressly forbidden to contact or see M. Despite this admonition the two managed to call one another, exchange letters and even see one another, although now with even more difficulty and irregularity. While the two continued to exchange sporadic letters and calls into 1968 there was a marked decrease starting in September 1966 (see Mott 486). This can be attributed to a number of factors. First, there were the increasingly difficult logistics involved in contacting each other. Second, M.'s graduation from nursing school in August of that year resulted in a move back home to Cincinnati. This only increased the literal and figurative distance between the two. Finally, it is possible that the relationship had simply run its course. Many relationships, even those that don't include a generational age difference, engagement to another man and professed monastic life, simply fizzle out after an initial period of intensity. One can only speculate as to what extent such mundane factors as distance and time apart played. In reading Merton's last two published journals, that chronicle the years 1966-1968, one sees a precipitous decrease in the number of mentions that Merton makes of M., or his feelings about her, after September 1966. In fact, his last published journal, *The Other Side of the Mountain*, which chronicles the period from October 1967 through December 1968, contains only four references to M. The last entry that mentions her occurs on August 20, 1968. With no preamble it matter-of-factly states, "Today, among other things, I burned M.'s letters. Incredible stupidity in 1966! I did not even glance at any one of them. High hot flames of the pine branches in the sun!"[16]

Finally, in examining Merton and M.'s relationship, it is necessary to briefly address its sexual component. Had this been a strictly platonic relationship then it would have simply been an intense friendship, arguably not in violation of his religious vows. This was, however, not the case. While Merton wants to be clear in his journals that they did not have intercourse, he does describe many encounters that seem to violate, if not the letter, the spirit of his vow of chastity. He describes many episodes of a sexual nature. As he describes one episode from late May, "We got ourselves quite aroused sexually last Thursday . . . . There is no question that I *cannot* let this become a sexual affair, it would be disastrous for us both. It simply must not happen. Also she is too curious about all that – and too passionate for me (her body to tell the truth was wonderful the other day, ready for the most magnificent love)" (*LL* 70). In particular there was an encounter that summer that progressed further than Merton had intended. He had arranged to meet M. alone at his psychiatrist's office and brought a bottle of champagne. Merton had used his doctor's office, when it was not in use, during past visits to Louisville to read and write between appointments (see Mott 444). While he does not describes the specifics of this encounter Merton biographer Michael Mott describes that Merton believed "he was in trouble with his vow" (Mott 444). As he describes in his journal, "I keep remembering her body, her nakedness, the day at Wygal's, and it haunts me" (*LL* 94). This issue is not being discussed because of any prurient interest. It must be addressed because as a monk and priest a romantic relationship that involved "the indulgence of the sexual appetite and . . . all voluntary carnal pleasures" was clearly forbidden. As will be shown, for months Merton's writings show that he was trying to justify his religious vows with this romantic relationship. How Merton attempted to do that is the subject of the next section of this essay.

Merton's Use of Zen to Justify His Relationship

Having explored Merton's understanding of Zen, its main sources, as well as his romantic relationship, it is now possible to move into the heart of this project. Merton was reading and writing a great deal about Zen at the time he began his relationship with M. As has been discussed, this relationship was contradictory to his life as a priest and cloistered monk. In this portion of the essay I show how he used Zen concepts to reconcile these two seemingly disparate lives.

There are a few passages in which Merton points to the formless, structureless nature of Zen to justify his relationship. This can be seen when he writes, "awoke with the deep realization that my response of love to M. was *right*. It might have nothing to do with the rule books or with any other system, it might be open to all kinds of delusions and error, but in fact so far by and large I have been acting right" (*LL* 45). In describing his relationship in the following passage one can see elements of the ineffable nature of Zen. "When we began, we knew it could not be understood. As we went along we wanted it to be understandable, and it never was. There is nothing *understandable* in love: just joy and then sorrow and then if you are lucky, more joy" (*LL* 309).

As has already been described, Merton is drawn to the idea of non-dualism that he finds espoused in Zen. This serves as one of the main ways he justifies his relationship with M. with his monastic life. Several entries in his journal show this at work. "I thought of God's love for her and mine. I can see absolutely no reason why my love for her and for Christ should necessarily be separated and opposed . . . . But if I love her purely and unselfishly – as I surely do here in solitude – then my love for her is part of my love for Him, part of my offering of myself to God" (*LL* 99).

This notion of non-dualism is also clearly expressed in the following passage: "What really is God's will for me? To live where I am living – to remain here – to be faithful to the grace of solitude – yet also a certain fidelity to my deep affections for M. – though this seems to involve a pure contradiction. And yet it does not *per se*. Only in a selfish exploitation would it become wrong" (*LL* 120). This journal entry is noteworthy because Merton explicitly addresses the contradictory nature of the two lives he was living. As has been shown he believes Zen is paradoxical in nature. In addition, Merton is very clear here in showing that if one does not think dualistically there is not a problem with leading this kind of life.

The following passage also embodies, as Merton understood it, the paradoxical nature of Zen: "The objective fact of my vows, more than a juridical obligation. It has deep personal and spiritual roots. I cannot be true to myself if I am not true to so deep a commitment. And yet I love her. There is nothing for it but to accept the seeming contradiction and make the best of it in trust" (*LL* 162). Once again, through Zen-like non-dualistic thinking this contradiction can be overcome. This next journal entry is a particularly good example of how non-dualism reconciled his two kinds of life. "I no longer know what these things mean, or what their opposites might mean. I am not passing from this to something that stands against it. I am not going anywhere. I exist because I have the habit of existing" (*LL* 303).

Merton sought to justify this relationship in Christian terms as well. In a long letter he wrote to M. in early summer 1966 Merton writes that the idea of a non-dualism that is rooted in Christ overcomes any apparent contradiction in his life:

> Dear, I have a terrible desire for fidelity to what has been far greater than either of us. And not a choice of fidelities to this or that, love or vows. But a fidelity beyond

> and above that to both of them in one, to God. To the Christ who is absolutely alone and not apart from us but is the dreadful deep hole in the midst of us, waiting for no explanation. (*LL* 305)

In yet another entry one can see how the non-dualism and unanalytical elements of Zen influenced Merton as he tried to justify his life as a monk and relationship with M. This is seen when he writes:

> What is my life? My solitude? The determination to be lucid and quiet and to wait, and to nourish the unspeakable hope of deep love which is beyond analysis and is so far down it has no voice left. Down there we are one voice: the voice of your womanness blends with the man I am, and we are one being, completing each other, though we no longer can express it by taking each other in our arms. (*LL* 306)

As has been discussed, Merton saw the Taoism espoused by Chuang Tzu as the primogenitor of Zen. The following passage embodies this notion that pursuit of virtue only ends in alienating one from that virtue that is being sought. As Merton writes:

> To think of love as an answer or a "solution" is to evade the stark directness of this discovery. The fact that you are you is something of absolute value to me. But if I love in a certain way this becomes covered over and hidden with all the operations of love and what happens then is that love takes the place of the beloved. Then love instead of being a solution (which it is not supposed to be) becomes a problem for which there is no solution. For then love stands in the way between the lovers. It veils the goodness of the beloved. It addresses (or undresses) the beloved as desirable object. Which is all right too, except that one loves desire instead of the beloved. (*LL* 307)

While this journal entry does not show Merton's efforts to justify his relationship, it is noteworthy because it demonstrates the fact that he was using Zen, and in this case its precursor – Chuang Tzu's Tao – to make sense of his relationship with M. Finally, in the following passage Merton explicitly invokes Zen to justify his monastic life with this relationship:

> I was thinking of what some old Zen joker said about "until you know the mind is no mind you do not understand it" and of course he is right: all the worried thoughts I have had today are not "my mind" and the thinking that goes on when I am like that is not "my mind." Whatever it is, it is not I. And then I realized how free one can really be. All these worries and anxieties have nothing to do with love either. . . . [L]ove is quite free and unconditional. It loves without seeking to explain itself even to itself. It does not, in other words, look for conditions under which it is reasonable to love, or right to love, it simply loves. And that is how I really love M. I love her unconditionally, straight, and always will. Because I will not be looking for conditions that will change it. True, externally we are hindered, but that does nothing to the essence of a love which is unconditional, for I do not say I will stop loving when I cannot see her or hold her close to me. I simply love. And all these worries about it are silly. (*LL* 335)

Summary and Conclusion

Thomas Merton remains a fascinating and enigmatic figure, with new generations continuing to be drawn to his life story and work. This chapter of his life encapsulates what many find fascinating about him. Thomas Merton was both apart from the world, living as a Trappist monk, but also a part of it by wrestling with and writing about issues of universal interest: peace, justice and love. His relationship with M. was no different. While it was intensely personal, Merton also reflected on issues that concern everyone: the need for love, the struggle to honor commitments, and the difficulty of submitting to authority. With the runaway success of his autobiography Merton became a larger-than-life figure. Behind this legend though was a complex man, full of contradictions, admirable attributes and pitiable flaws – which is to say, Merton was human.

The fullness of his humanity is evident in examining his life in the spring and summer of 1966. For the first time in decades Merton experienced romantic love and it turned his world upside down. During this time Merton was also reading and writing a great deal about Eastern religions, and in particular Zen. Merton searched for ways to reconcile his life as a priest and monk with his love for M. It is clear that one of the ways he justified these two disparate lives was by applying some concepts, at least as he understood them, from Zen. In particular, the formless, unanalytical, paradoxical and non-dualistic elements of Zen helped justify Merton's life as a priest and monk with his relationship with M. This fascinating part of his life adds even more layers of complexity to both the legend of Thomas Merton, as well as to the man seeking to make sense of his life.

1. For the correspondence between Merton and Wu, and related materials, see Cristóbal Serrán-Pagán, ed., *Merton & the Tao: Dialogues with John Wu and the Ancient Sages* (Louisville, KY: Fons Vitae, 2013). See also "A Christian Looks at Zen," Merton's introduction to Wu's *The Golden Age of Zen*, in Thomas Merton, *Zen and the Birds of Appetite* (New York: New Directions, 1968) 33-58; subsequent references will be cited as "*ZBA*" parenthetically in the text.
2. For the complete correspondence see Thomas Merton and D. T. Suzuki, *Encounter*, ed. Robert E. Daggy (Monterey, KY: Larkspur Press, 1988) 1-74; see also Merton's essay "D. T. Suzuki: The Man and His Work" (*ZBA* 54-66).
3. For Merton's account of the meeting see Thomas Merton, *Dancing in the Water of Life: Seeking Peace in the Hermitage. Journals, vol. 5: 1963-1965*, ed. Robert E. Daggy (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1997) 111-17.
4. John Wu, *The Golden Age of Zen* (Taipei: National War College in Co-operation with the Committee on the Compilation of the Chinese Library, 1967) 59.
5. Daisetz Teitaro Suzuki, and Christmas Humphreys. *An Introduction to Zen Buddhism* (London: Rider, 1960) 22.
6. A great deal has been written about Merton's understanding of Buddhism: see John Keenan, "The Limits of Thomas Merton's Understanding of Buddhism," in Bonnie Thurston, ed., *Merton & Buddhism: Wisdom, Emptiness & Everyday Mind* (Louisville, KY: Fons Vitae, 2007) 118-33 and John Dadosky, "Merton's Dialogue with Zen: Pioneering or Passé?" *Fu Jen International Religious Studies* 2.1 (2008) 53-75 for more discussion of this issue.
7. Thomas Merton, *The Way of Chuang Tzu* (New York: New Directions, 1965) 16; subsequent references will be cited as "*WCT*" parenthetically in the text.
8. Thomas Merton, *Mystics and Zen Masters* (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1967) ix-x; subsequent references will be cited as "*MZM*" parenthetically in the text.
9. Originally intended to serve as an introduction for *The Wisdom of the Desert* (New York: New Directions, 1960), Merton's collection of translations of selected sayings of the Desert Fathers, but not permitted by Cistercian authorities to be published in that volume, it appeared initially in *New Directions Annual* 17 (1961) 65-101.
10. Thomas Merton, *The Asian Journal*, ed. Naomi Burton Stone, Brother Patrick Hart and James Laughlin (New York: New Directions, 1973) 310.
11. See *The Catholic Encyclopedia Online*, http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/03637d.htm.

12. Editors of Merton's journals have rightly decided to keep this woman's identity private and referred to her simply as M. While her name has been published in some biographies and online, I will also use the same abbreviation.
13. See Michael Mott, *The Seven Mountains of Thomas Merton* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1984) 435; subsequent references will be cited as "Mott" parenthetically in the text.
14. Thomas Merton, *Learning to Love: Exploring Solitude and Freedom. Journals, vol. 6: 1966-1967*, ed. Christine M. Bochen (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1997) 38; subsequent references will be cited as "*LL*" parenthetically in the text.
15. For a thorough exploration of this relationship see Roger Lipsey, *Make Peace Before the Sun Goes Down: The Long Encounter of Thomas Merton and His Abbot, James Fox* (Boston: Shambhala, 2015).
16. Thomas Merton, *The Other Side of the Mountain: The End of the Journey. Journals, vol. 7: 1967-1968*, ed. Patrick Hart (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1998) 157.