

# Interreligious Dialogue

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[W]e self-styled believers have assumed that we are always right, you were always wrong; we knew, you did not know; we had everything to tell you, but you would not listen. In actual fact while I certainly believe that the message of the Gospel is something that we are called upon to preach, I think we will communicate it more intelligently in dialogue. Half of talking is listening. And listening implies that the other speaker also has something to say.<sup>1</sup>

It seems a strange coincidence that an encounter with a Hindu monk first led Thomas Merton to a deeper investigation of the Christian mystical tradition. It was 1938 and Merton was a graduate student at Columbia University in New York. In his autobiography Merton recounts in entirely positive terms his unlikely friendship with Bramachari: "We got along very well together, especially since he sensed that I was trying to feel my way into a settled religious conviction, and into some kind of life that was centered, as his was, on God."<sup>2</sup> In describing Bramachari's character Merton recalls a particularly poignant interaction:

He did not generally put his words in the form of advice: but the one counsel he did give me is something that I will not easily forget: "There are many beautiful mystical books written by the Christians. You should read St. Augustine's *Confessions* and *The Imitation of Christ*."<sup>3</sup>

It was not exactly the advice Merton expected to receive from a Hindu monk, but it was prophetic nonetheless. In hindsight Merton hypothesized: "it seems to me very probable that one of the reasons why God had brought him all the way from India, was that he might say just that."<sup>4</sup> Michael Mott describes Bramachari's advice

to return to Christian sources "to be of the greatest importance in Merton's life."<sup>5</sup> Later that year, due in part to the influence of Bramachari, Merton was received into the Roman Catholic Church. In many respects this early friendship was indicative of Merton's mature approach to interreligious dialogue in that his own faith was enriched through contact with a person of deep spiritual conviction.

Despite this encouraging contact with a Hindu monk early on in his life, much of Merton's writing over the next decade or so was largely dismissive toward other religions. Several of Merton's early books contain statements that deride the spiritual experience of other religious traditions. For example, in *Seeds of Contemplation* he writes: "Outside the *magisterium* directly guided by the Holy Spirit of God we find no such contemplation and union with Him—only the void of nirvana or the feeble intellectual light of Platonic idealism, or the sensual dreams of the Sufis."<sup>6</sup> Paul Pearson explains:

Merton's attitude at this period is hardly surprising. When Merton entered Gethsemani he was still a fairly recent convert, without a great deal of religious background knowledge. His early monastic years were spent acquainting himself with Christian spirituality, preparing for ordination, and then preparing classes to teach first the scholastics at the abbey and then the novices.<sup>7</sup>

Surprising or not, it was an attitude that Merton would regret. In a revision of *Seeds*, published later that year, Merton cut the negative assertions, later describing the entire first edition as lacking in "ecumenical spirit."<sup>8</sup>

Only in the mid-to late-1950s did Merton begin to read extensively about other religious traditions. His growing interest anticipated the official openness of the Catholic Church toward the world religions as documented in *Nostra Aetate* of the Second Vatican Council (1962-65). In *Conjectures of a Guilty Bystander* he reflects:

If the Catholic Church is turning to the modern world and to the other Christian Churches, and if she is perhaps for

the first time seriously taking note of the non-Christian religions in their own terms, then it becomes necessary for at least a few contemplative and monastic theologians to contribute something of their own to the discussion.<sup>9</sup>

Merton's contribution to the discussion was extensive, not the least because of his voluminous correspondence with an impressive array of friends and contacts. While it is important to recognize what a fellow monk describes as the almost "steady stream of persons" seeking to visit Merton in the monastery, the seclusion of the monastery and the solitude of the monastic lifestyle meant that Merton's primary means of communication was by mail.<sup>10</sup> Following is a selective introduction to some of his interreligious friends that is intended to provide a taste of Merton's broad-ranging religious interests.

Merton's first interreligious contacts were with Christians from other denominations. In 1958 he hosted a group of students from Vanderbilt University in Nashville. Later more students came to visit from other Protestant schools, including: Lexington Theological Seminary, Southern Baptist Seminary, Presbyterian Seminary, and Asbury Methodist Seminary.<sup>11</sup> His most enduring Protestant friendship began in 1960 with Glenn Hinson, a young Baptist professor of church history at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. Much like his appraisal of other religious traditions, Merton's early view of Protestantism was fairly dismal. Yet four years after his initial contact with Hinson, Merton was able to write:

I have learned very much from my contacts with my friends there at the Seminary, and I don't think I will ever be capable of returning to a narrow and rigid view of the Church any more. Definitions have to be made and we have to stand by them, but in fact we will always realize how much greater is God than anything we can explain, predict or define. His actions and His mercy in our midst always overflow our expectations, and we can never expect Him to fit in to the limits we have assigned, even when we thought He Himself was showing us where to assign them.<sup>12</sup>

Beyond alternative Christian traditions, Merton's most serious contact with Judaism came through Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel. Merton initiated a written dialogue with the Jewish theologian in 1960. They had each read the other's books and their conversation centered on topics such as biblical revelation and God's holiness. However, their relationship took on real urgency when Heschel visited Gethsemani on July 13, 1964. Heschel raised with Merton the issue of the Second Vatican Council's statement on Jewish-Christian relations: Heschel had been acting as a Jewish advisor to the Council in this area, and his concern was that a second draft of the document was rumored to be a dramatically weakened version of the original statement, which had stood in strong solidarity with Jews. Merton's response was to contact Cardinal Augustin Bea of the Secretariat for Christian Unity, urging the council not to miss such an important "opportunity for repentance and truth."<sup>13</sup> The final document ended closer to Heschel's original desire.<sup>14</sup>

Rather than viewing Christianity as a replacement of Judaism, Merton argues strongly for the New Testament as a fulfillment of the Old. His perspective is forcefully conveyed in a short excerpt from *Conjectures of a Guilty Bystander*:

One has either to be a Jew or stop reading the Bible. The Bible cannot make sense to anyone who is not "spiritually a Semite." The spiritual sense of the Old Testament is not and cannot be a simple emptying out of its Israelite content. Quite the contrary! The New Testament is the fulfillment of the spiritual content, the fulfillment of the promise made to Abraham, the promise that Abraham believed in. It is never therefore a denial of Judaism, but its affirmation. Those who consider it a denial have not understood it.<sup>15</sup>

As William Shannon notes, for Merton a shared heritage also implied a shared destiny; therefore, for Merton the Jews remain the people of God along with the Christian Church.<sup>16</sup>

Merton's interest in Islam centered primarily on Sufi mysticism, and his primary contact was Abdul Aziz, a Muslim and Sufi scholar who lived in Pakistan. Their relationship began after Aziz

asked Louis Massignon, a Catholic scholar of Islamic mysticism, for "the name and address of some genuine Christian saint and contemplative mystic."<sup>17</sup> Although they never met in person, Sidney Griffith asserts that their letters represent "one of the most interesting epistolary exchanges between a Muslim and a Christian in the twentieth century."<sup>18</sup> Despite real doctrinal differences surrounding the nature of God and the role of Christ in redemption, Merton and Aziz pushed forward in their dialogue focusing largely on religious experience. This is not to say that their differences were inconsequential; rather, as Merton was fond of saying, he desired to say "yes" wherever he could. One example of this sharing of religious experience is Merton's description to Aziz of his own method of prayer:

Strictly speaking I have a very simple way of prayer. It is centered entirely on attention to the presence of God and to His will and His love. That is to say that it is centered on *faith* by which alone we can know the presence of God. One might say this gives my meditation the character described by the Prophet as "being before God as if you saw Him." Yet it does not mean imagining anything or concerning a precise image of God, for to my mind this would be a kind of idolatry."<sup>19</sup>

Merton's letters with Aziz are a model of a kind of dialogue that can be deeply personal when it is grounded in mutual trust.

Almost thirty years after meeting the Hindu monk Bramachari, Merton made another close Indian friend in the poet and philosopher, Amiya Chakravarty. The impetus for their correspondence came from Chakravarty, who was introducing his students at Smith College to some of Merton's writings. This endeavor culminated in 1967 when Chakravarty organized a "Merton Evening" at Smith hoping to provoke discussion with his students on some of Merton's more recent publications. According to Chakravarty's report, the evening was a success, the students having been "immersed in the silence and eloquence of your thoughts and writings...."<sup>20</sup> In response to the encouraging event, Merton responded by affirming

the students' experience:

I do really have the feeling that you have all understood and shared quite perfectly. That you have seen something that I see to be most precious – and available too. The reality that is present to us and in us: call it Being, call it Atman, call it Pneuma... or Silence. And the simple fact that by being attentive, by learning to listen (or recovering the natural capacity to listen which cannot be learned any more than breathing), we can find ourself engulfed in such happiness that it cannot be explained: the happiness of being at one with everything in that hidden ground of Love for which there can be no explanations."<sup>21</sup>

From a Christian theological perspective the "hidden ground of Love" is nothing more or less than the self-giving nature of the triune God who sustains all things through love; but Merton understood that at some level this Reality is present to everyone, regardless of religious affiliation.

Unquestionably Merton's great religious interest, apart from Christianity, was Buddhism, and specifically Zen. His interest in Zen was sparked and fanned into flames through the work of D.T. Suzuki, an early and prolific exponent of Zen to the Western world. Merton began writing to Suzuki in 1959 and they continued a sporadic correspondence until Suzuki's death in 1966. Beyond letters, Merton also invited Suzuki to respond to a book he had published on *The Wisdom of the Desert Fathers*. Suzuki accepted the invitation, and the ensuing dialogue is published in the book, *Zen and the Birds of Appetite*. Merton and Suzuki had occasion to meet in 1964 at Columbia University and Merton was greatly impacted by their encounter.<sup>22</sup> Beyond Zen and Suzuki, Merton was also privileged to meet other high profile Buddhists, including Thich Nhat Hanh, who was an influential peace activist during the Vietnam War. In solidarity with Nhat Hanh and his cause Merton wrote the brief article entitled "Nhat Hanh Is My Brother."<sup>23</sup>

In the last year of his life Merton journeyed to Asia for two months. This included time in India, Sri Lanka, and Thailand.

Bonnie Thurston suggests that on his journey Merton became "more and more enthusiastic about Tibetan Buddhism" after meeting with several Tibetans including the Dalai Lama.<sup>24</sup> The two were scheduled for one visit only, but the young spiritual leader of Tibet requested two more after their fruitful, initial encounter. In their conversation they spoke of meditation, monasticism, and Marxism. Years later the Dalai Lama recollected in his autobiography: "I could see [Merton] was a truly humble and deeply spiritual man. This was the first time that I had been struck by such a feeling of spirituality in anyone who professed Christianity."<sup>25</sup>

A significant portion of Merton's mature writing was oriented toward other religious traditions. One might suspect that Merton was an early forerunner of the now dominant comparative approach to religion. In the fact that he promoted learning about non-Christian religions this is probably true, but Merton was not at all interested in a detached knowledge of religious doctrines and practices. He was eminently interested in other religious traditions for the sake of his own—and others'—inner, spiritual transformation. In a paper he prepared for his journey to Asia, Merton wrote:

I speak as a Western monk who is pre-eminently concerned with his own monastic calling and dedication. I have left my monastery to come here not as a research scholar or even as an author (which I also happen to be). I come as a pilgrim who is anxious to obtain not just information, not just "facts" about other monastic traditions, but to drink from the ancient sources of monastic vision and experience. I seek not only to learn more (quantitatively) about religion and about monastic life, but to become a better and more enlightened monk (qualitatively) myself.<sup>26</sup>

Instead of a comparative approach to religious traditions, Merton sought a *sapiential* approach, which is to say one oriented toward the wisdom of lived experience. The comparative approach he likened to "a bored tourist saunter[ing] through the Louvre vaguely registering the famous masterpieces as he walked by them." His own desire was to drink from the wells of ancient Eastern thought



so that they might "lead us to a deeper and wiser understanding of our own magnificent mystical tradition, just as Platonism, without actually 'influencing' the Greek Fathers, gave them a language and a sensibility that were equipped to penetrate in a specially significant way the depths of the revealed mystery of Christ."<sup>27</sup>

Did Merton think the tradition of Christian wisdom was insufficient or lacking? Not at all. He recognized that the ideology of secularity springing forth from the modern project was threatening to de-sacralize the entire world. Efficiency overpowered wisdom; pragmatism trumped virtue; and greed threatened the earth itself. Merton saw that any kind of spiritual existence was in peril, and he sought an antidote by entering into dialogue with all that is "pure, wise, profound and humane in every kind of culture."<sup>28</sup> In a reworked version of his essay, "Christian Culture Needs Oriental Wisdom," Merton commented on the need for global wisdom:

Christopher Dawson has remarked on the "religious vacuum" in our education. It is absolutely essential to introduce into our study of the humanities a dimension of wisdom oriented to contemplation as well as to wise action. For this, it is no longer sufficient merely to go back over the Christian and European cultural traditions. The horizons of the world are no longer confined to Europe and America. We have to gain new perspectives, and on this our spiritual, and even our physical survival may depend.<sup>29</sup>

Intimately tied to Merton's search for wisdom was his longing for peace. Born early in the First World War, experiencing the death of his younger brother in the Second World War, and living his whole adult life in the shadow of the bomb, Merton was a tireless advocate for peace. In many ways Merton's search for wisdom served his work for peace. This is not to say that his search for wisdom was subordinate to his work for peace; Merton would have said that his work for peace flowed out of and, indeed, depended upon his search for wisdom. This manifested itself in two ways: first, a realization that there will be no peace in the world that does not grow out of an inner peace already achieved; and second, that there is no peace in the world without peace shared between friends.

Merton's search for wisdom facilitated both of these ends: inner transformation and spiritual friendship. With respect to these ends, dialogue was for Merton far more than the mere communication of ideas; on a deeper level dialogue is oriented toward communion between friends realized through shared contact with God. In an informal talk delivered at Calcutta in 1968 Merton said:

The deepest level of communication is not communication, but communion. It is wordless. It is beyond words, and it is beyond speech, and it is beyond concept. Not that we discover a new unity. We discover an older unity. My dear brothers, we are already one. But we imagine that we are not. And what we have to recover is our original unity. What we have to be is what we are.<sup>30</sup>

This awareness of a primordial unity—the "hidden ground of Love"—allowed Merton to act as a bridge between persons of disparate religious paths and as a sign of peace.<sup>31</sup>

Thomas Merton also entered into dialogue for the sake of truth. This might seem strange for a Christian—or any religious adherent—to admit, yet Merton thought it central. In this respect Merton is especially indebted to Anselm of Canterbury (1033–1109). In a pair of essays written in the mid-1960s, Merton delved into Anselm's *Proslogion* (his so-called "Ontological Argument" for the existence of God) and his theological treatise on *Cur Deus Homo* ("Why God Became Man"). These two essays represent some of the more rigorous thinking that Merton did on theological methodology in interreligious dialogue.<sup>32</sup> Anselm's theological method, borrowed from Augustine, is summarized by the phrase, "faith seeking understanding." With this phrase these two great Christian theologians remind us that there is a distinction between faith and understanding. For example, the Christian may believe on the basis of biblical revelation that "the Word became flesh" (John 1:14). But the truth of this belief remains to be fully understood in the sense that it is not immediately comprehensible to the believer why this must be. Anselm undertakes this specific task in his *Cur Deus Homo* by seeking to provide the necessary reasons. In other

words, he seeks to understand the truth he already believes. Merton explains:

Without abandoning the level of faith, and yet without demanding that the unbeliever place himself on the level of faith, Anselm institutes an intelligent, sympathetic dialogue in which the truth of faith makes itself accessible and highly attractive on the level of reason. Here is the genuine essence of ecumenical dialogue in which, without one interlocutor trying to establish that he alone is "right" on all points, both strive to share as much as they can of a truth they possess to some extent in common.<sup>33</sup>

This method in dialogue is not a matter of pretending to share a common search for truth. While the unbeliever (historically Merton places Anselm in a Muslim context) may not share the article of faith, she is certainly capable (if she so desires) of walking alongside the believer in her intellectual search for faith *understood*. Merton found in Anselm a model for interreligious dialogue in the pursuit of truth.

Still, both Anselm and Merton go one step further. In a certain sense truth itself is not the final goal, for truth—at least in skeletal form—is already received by the Christian through the gift of faith. Yet in fleshing out truth by way of rational discourse something more is received. Merton explains:

But Anselm's dialogue is actually for Boson [Anselm's companion] and himself even more than it is for the hypothetical Moslem [sic]. His purpose is to increase, by reason, their Christian joy in revealed truth. Intelligible joy is regarded by Anselm as one of the characteristic fruits of monastic study and prayer. The understanding which faith attains by meditation, study, prayer and intuition stands half-way between the obscure assent of faith and the pure light of the beatific vision.<sup>34</sup>

Thus, for Merton, interreligious dialogue springs forth in joy by leading the participants further into the truth of faith. For Christians this is the joy of experiencing faith slowly being transformed into

sight. In a letter to Abdul Aziz Merton expresses this purpose perfectly: "Let us then in joy and humility take the unknown good which He is offering us in this increased understanding of our faiths."<sup>35</sup> This is not some sort of back-door attempt at proselytization; it is merely all the Christian has to offer as one who is bound (in freedom) to the person of Christ.<sup>36</sup> Nor is one's partner in dialogue merely a means to a particular end: "The Anselmian proof has no utilitarian purpose: it merely adds to the joy and serenity of belief the further joy and clarity of understanding the evident truth."<sup>37</sup> More than a *purpose* in dialogue, joy (along with wisdom, peace, and truth) is a *fruit* of dialogue; in other words, it is not possible to get at it directly through efficient means: one must water the dialogue by seeking first to honour the other and only then is there any possibility for fruit to grow.

It is no secret that there are religious people who are so entirely self-assured in their own beliefs that the notion of interreligious dialogue—where *listening* might take on a weight equal to that of *talking*—sounds nonsensical and even dangerous. What is the point of listening when *I* already have the truth? On the other hand, some people tend to think that every ardently-held faith claim is a sign of personal hubris and ought to be stamped out. What right has anyone to claim some corner on absolute truth? The former perspective tends to materialize in apologetics—a vigorous defense of one's own faith; the latter in syncretism—an insipid approval of any and every spiritual fancy. Merton had no interest in either of these approaches to interreligious encounter. In an increasingly fragmented world, Merton insisted that dialogue—that is, open and honest sharing with the other—was the proper posture for fruitful interreligious encounter.

To facilitate this type of dialogue two values were essential for Merton: the dignity of every person; and a humility that accompanies true knowledge. The dignity of every person means that everyone has something valuable to contribute; the limits on human knowledge mean that everyone can learn something by listening. Patrick O'Connell, drawing on Merton's book *Faith*

*and Violence*, highlights these values perfectly by linking them to Merton's principles of nonviolence. They include:

a respect for the humanity and dignity of the other, a recognition that no single point of view has a monopoly on the truth, a willingness to learn from the other, a commitment to truth rather than to defending one's own position, a "person-oriented" approach that "does not seek so much to *control* as to *respond*, and to *awaken response*," which promotes an "openness of free exchange in which reason and love have freedom of action."<sup>38</sup>

The balance between apologetics and syncretism may seem like a precarious line to walk, but Anselm's method of "faith seeking understanding" offered Merton solid ground: "I think we have now reached a stage of (long overdue) religious maturity at which it may be possible for someone to remain perfectly faithful to a Christian and Western monastic commitment, and yet to learn in depth from, say, a Buddhist or Hindu discipline and experience."<sup>39</sup> This realization is really a matter of recognizing the universal human condition in which all religious experience is formed. To learn from the other therefore opens the possibility of becoming more fully human. Merton explains:

the more I am able to affirm others, to say "yes" to them in myself, by discovering them in myself and myself in them, the more real I am. I am fully real if my own heart says *yes to everyone*. I will be a better Catholic, not if I can *refute* every shade of Protestantism, but if I can affirm the truth in it and still go further. So, too, with the Muslims, the Hindus, the Buddhists, etc. This does not mean syncretism, indifferentism, the vapid and careless friendliness that accepts everything by thinking of nothing. There is much that one cannot "affirm" and "accept," but first one must say "yes" where one really can.<sup>40</sup>

While some popular commentators have suspected that Merton's journey East (both figuratively and literally) was rooted in a desire to move beyond Christian faith, any serious study of his life and

writings easily disposes of this theory. That his faith remained entirely Catholic is affirmed both by Merton's own words and by those who knew him. After Merton's death Amiya Chakravarty wrote of Merton's approach to other religions:

Readers of Thomas Merton know that his openness to mankind's spiritual horizons came from a rootedness of faith; and inner security led him to explore, experience, and interpret the affinities and differences between religions in light of his own religion. That light was Christianity.<sup>41</sup>

Merton knew that it is precisely the particularity of one's faith commitments that makes dialogue even possible, for otherwise communication would lack openness and integrity. Regarding his own faith commitments Merton comments:

I think a Catholic is bound to remember that his faith is directed to the grasp of truths revealed by God, which are not simply accessible by reason alone. That these truths are not mere opinions or "manners of speaking," mere viewpoints which can be adopted or rejected at will—for otherwise the commitment of faith would lack not only totality but even seriousness. The Catholic is one who stakes his life on certain truths revealed by God. If these truths cease to apply, his life ceases to have meaning.<sup>42</sup>

Most important of all for Merton this meant a commitment to the person of Christ: "What is the use of coming to modern man with the claim that you have a Christian mission—that you are sent in the name of Christ—if in the same breath you deny Him by whom you claim to be sent?"<sup>43</sup>

But dialogue is not merely a matter of sharing faith commitments; it is seeking to communicate the truth of the respective faith commitments of each in a comprehensible way, and this requires an empathetic search for some sort of common ground between the persons involved in dialogue. Historically (at least in the Christian tradition), the common ground for interreligious dialogue has often been reason. For example, this is the common ground Anselm puts forward in his *Cur Deus Homo*. While admitting the difficulty of his subject matter and the complexity



of his argument, he assures the reader: "it is intelligible to all, and appealing because of its utility and the beauty of its logic."<sup>44</sup> Without rejecting or demeaning the common ground of reason for interreligious dialogue (Merton's positive appraisal of Anselm negates this concern), Merton certainly preferred another ground for himself: wisdom. Merton was less interested in the reason exercised in abstract theological arguments and more in the wisdom received through concrete spiritual experience.<sup>45</sup> This was the atmosphere of his monastic vocation. In putting forward this avenue for dialogue he is careful to articulate the positive potential while not overstating his case:

Without asserting that there is complete unity of all religions at the "top," the transcendent or mystical level—that they all start from different dogmatic positions to "meet" at this summit—it is certainly true to say that even where there are irreconcilable differences in doctrine and in formulated belief, there may still be great similarities and analogies in the realm of religious experience.<sup>46</sup>

Like the Apostle Paul, Merton wanted at least to begin the dialogue with the awareness that in God "we live and move and have our being" (Acts 17:28). A key point is this: Merton's approval of reason and wisdom as common grounds for interreligious dialogue is by no means arbitrary; both are rooted in the person of Christ—the *Logos* and *Sophia* of God (John 1:1; 1 Corinthians 1:24).<sup>47</sup> Finding common ground is therefore never a matter of bracketing off one's faith; it is an empathetic search for a comprehensible means of expressing one's deeply held religious convictions in a way that the other can hear, understand, and respond to in an authentic way.

Merton was an early practitioner of interreligious dialogue. By letter and in person he befriended many others on their own spiritual paths. In these encounters his primary concern was always respecting other persons, which included their religious convictions. The resources available to Merton in his study of the great world religions paled in comparison to the knowledge that is at our disposal today. Yet Merton was grounded in what is elusive to many

in our world today: wisdom. He acquired this wisdom through years of carefully studying the Christian scriptures and tradition, through rigorous monastic discipline, and through unhurried contemplation. Merton's reasons for entering into interreligious dialogue were many; but most of all, I would suggest, he was concerned with entering more deeply into the mystery of Christ, the power and wisdom of God.

### Endnotes

1. Thomas Merton, *Faith and Violence: Christian Teaching and Christian Practice* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1984), 202.
2. Thomas Merton, *The Seven Storey Mountain* (New York: Harvest, 1998), 214.
3. Merton, *Seven Storey Mountain*, 216.
4. Merton, *Seven Storey Mountain*, 216.
5. Michael Mott, *The Seven Mountains of Thomas Merton* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1984), 113.
6. Paul Pearson, "Foreword" in William Apel, *Signs of Peace: The Interfaith Letters of Thomas Merton* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2006), xii.
7. Pearson, "Foreword," *Signs of Peace*, xii.
8. Pearson, "Foreword," *Signs of Peace*, xii.
9. Thomas Merton, *Conjectures of a Guilty Bystander* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1966), vii.
10. John Eludes Bamberger, quoted in Brother Patrick Hart, ed., *Thomas Merton, Monk: A Monastic Tribute* (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 1983), 39, quoted in *Signs of Peace*, 104.
11. Pearson, "Foreword," *Signs of Peace*, xiii.
12. Thomas Merton quoted in *Signs of Peace*, 122.
13. Thomas Merton, *The Hidden Ground of Love: The Letters of Thomas Merton on Religious Experience and Social Concerns*, ed. William H. Shannon (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1985), 433.
14. Apel, *Signs of Peace*, 79.



15. Merton, *Conjectures*, 5-6.
16. William H. Shannon, *Silent Lamp: The Thomas Merton Story* (New York: Crossroad, 1993), 268.
17. Merton, *Hidden Ground of Love*, 43.
18. Sidney H. Griffith, "One Spiritual Man to Another: The Merton-Abdul Aziz Correspondence," in *Merton and Sufism: The Untold Story*, ed. Rob Baker and Gray Henry (Louisville, KY: Fons Vitae, 1999), 101-2, quoted in *Signs of Peace*, 10.
19. Merton, *Hidden Ground of Love*, 63-64.
20. Apel, *Signs of Peace*, 39.
21. Merton, *Hidden Ground of Love*, 115.
22. See Merton's journal entry in Robert E. Daggy, ed., *Dancing in the Water of Life* (New York: HarperCollins, 1997), 116.
23. "Nhat Hanh Is My Brother," in Merton, *Faith and Violence*, 106-108.
24. Bonnie B. Thurston, "Unfolding of a New World: Merton and Buddhism," in *Merton & Buddhism: Wisdom, Emptiness & Everyday Mind*, ed. Bonnie Bowman Thurston (Louisville, KY: Fons Vitae, 2007), 18.
25. Dalai Lama XIV, *Freedom in Exile* (New York: HarperCollins, 1990), 189.
26. Thomas Merton, *The Asian Journal of Thomas Merton*, ed. Naomi Burton, Brother Patrick Hart & James Laughlin (New York: New Directions, 1975), 312-13.
27. Thomas Merton, "Christian Culture Needs Oriental Wisdom," *Catholic World* 195 (May 1962): 78.
28. Merton, "Christian Culture," 79.
29. Thomas Merton, *Mystics and Zen Masters* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1967), 80.
30. Merton, *Asian Journal*, 308.
31. For the phrase "sign of peace," see Merton's letter to Dona Luisa Coomaraswamy (wife of Ananda Coomaraswamy) in *Hidden Ground of Love*, 126.
32. For a more in-depth analysis see Ryan Scruggs, "Faith Seeking Understanding: Theological Method in Thomas Merton's Interreligious

- Dialogue," *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 46:3 (Summer 2011), 411-26. Some of the material in the chapter has been adapted with permission from this article.
33. Thomas Merton, "Reflections on some Recent Studies of St. Anselm," *Monastic Studies* 3 (1965): 225-26.
34. Merton, "Reflections," 226.
35. Merton, *Hidden Ground of Love*, 46.
36. In a letter to Dona Luisa Coomaraswamy, Merton is quite clear that proselytizing cannot be a purpose of interreligious dialogue. Interestingly, his reasoning is theological: while Christians are called to proclaim the Gospel – to "announce the good tidings of God's infinite love" – the actual process of conversion must be left entirely to the freedom of the Holy Spirit. To suppose that humans are "convert-makers" is to capitulate to "the awful business of 'modern techniques of propaganda.'" See Merton, *Hidden Ground of Love*, 128-29.
37. Thomas Merton, "St. Anselm and His Argument," *The American Benedictine Review* 17:1 (March 1966): 252.
38. William H. Shannon, Christine M. Bochen, and Patrick F. O'Connell, eds. *Thomas Merton Encyclopedia* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2002), 220.
39. Merton, *Asian Journal of Thomas Merton*, 313.
40. Merton, *Conjectures*, 129.
41. Amiya Chakravarty, "Preface," *Asian Journal*, vii. Along the same lines Chakravarty writes in a letter to Merton: "The young scholars here realize that the absolute rootedness of your faith makes you free to understand other faiths...." And John Wu, the Catholic scholar of Chinese religions, writes in a letter to Merton: "You are so deeply Christian that you cannot help touching the vital springs of other religions." See Merton, *Hidden Ground of Love*, 115, 620.
42. Merton, *Conjectures*, 306.
43. Merton, *Conjectures*, 307. In a letter written on his Asian journey to friends back at home Merton reinforces this point: "I wish you all the peace and joy in the Lord and an increase of faith: for in my contacts with these new friends I also feel consolation in my own faith in Christ and His indwelling presence." See Merton, *Asian Journal*, 325.
44. Brian Davies and Gillian Evans, eds., *Anselm of Canterbury: The*

*Major Works* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 265.

45. Despite Merton's preference for spirituality, he always upheld the relevance of theology. For example: "Dogmatic and mystical theology, or theology and 'spirituality' are not to be set apart in mutually exclusive categories. ... Unless they are united, there is no fervor, no life and no spiritual value in theology, no substance, no meaning and no sure orientation in the contemplative life." See Thomas Merton, *New Seeds of Contemplation* (New York: New Directions, 1972), 254-55.

46. Merton, *Asian Journal*, 312.

47. For a development of these themes see Lawrence Cunningham, *Thomas Merton and the Monastic Vision* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1999), 11, especially.