

Overcoming Dualism – Unifying Experiences in Thomas Merton’s Dream Life



Dedicated to my beloved and venerated mentor
and friend, Richard Rohr

Thomas Merton was a wide-awake and enormously productive “guilty bystander”, an observer and commentator of the daily events in the *outside world*, a prophet and visionary.¹ At the same time, he was someone who explored the *inner world*, carefully recording and competently interpreting his own (and sometimes others’) dreams. In daytime, he also had mystical and clairvoyant experiences once in a while that softened and healed his inner turmoil, because in those moments he experienced himself, God, and the world as being one.

Groundbreaking was such an experience in 1958. On March 18 that year, during a visit to Louisville in order to run some errands, Merton has a central vision which dissolves his inner tension between monastic life and contemporaneity in the “world” once and for all. It marks the threshold to his last ten years of life so to speak, during which his conscience, with his striving for wholeness and totality, should shift several times and gradually leave many kinds of dualism behind:

1 Thomas Merton, *Conjectures of a Guilty Bystander*, Gethsemani/Kentucky 1965; New York/New York, 2014.

*In Louisville, at the corner of Fourth and Walnut, in the center of the shopping district, I was suddenly overwhelmed with the realization that I loved all these people, that they were mine and I theirs, that we could not be alien to one another even though we were total strangers. It was like waking from a dream of separateness, of spurious self-isolation in a special world, the world of renunciation and supposed holiness [...] This sense of liberation from an illusory difference was such a relief and such a joy to me that I almost laughed out loud.*²

This experience turns Merton's earlier concept of a specially blessed monastic lifestyle upside down. Nevertheless, he remains a monk by giving his call a new interpretation: this experience of human unity makes him a representative for all people. No wonder it happens neither at church nor in his hermitage, but in the middle of the bustle of the big city. However, it does not lead him into political activism as some of his politically engaged friends would have wished for, but back into his new and more deeply understood loneliness.

Dreams and archetypes

This experience is a kind of biographical colon. What follows in Merton's biography is the consequent overcoming a series of dualisms: first of all the polar opposition between male and female, and, in his last years, the contrast between Christian and Eastern spiritual ways. At the end, there is also the encounter with the divine (inner) child as one of the symbols of the True Self. This development manifests itself in Merton's dreams. He entrusts many of them to his diaries – with precise perception of even the finest nuances.

Dreams play a prominent role in the Hebrew and Greek Bible. Just think of the dream of the patriarch Jacob of the stairway to heaven (Genesis chapter 28) or the dreams and dream interpretations of his son Joseph (Genesis chapters 37, 40 and 41). In the book of Job, dreams at one time are considered "the second language of God".³ The Hebrew wisdom literature sheds light on the idea that dreams serve our healing and becoming whole.

In the New Testament, God reveals himself through dreams to Joseph, the husband of Mary, and to the magi from the East (Matthew chapters 1 and 2). Pilate's wife, because of a nightmare, wants to prevent her husband from putting Jesus, the "righteous one", to death (Matthew 27:19). Peter and Paul are motivated by striking dreams to take new steps (Acts chapter 10 and 11: Peter through a dream overcomes the dualism between "pure" and "unclean"; Acts 16:9f. Because of a nocturnal vision, Paul dares to take the missionary step to Macedonia and thus to Europe). Dreams broaden horizons and prepare for developments and ever fuller integration.

However, there is no lack of warnings in the Hebrew Bible against paying *too* much gullible attention to each and every dream, or misusing them to underpin one's own ego agenda. In Jeremiah 23:28, for instance, the prophet warns in the name of God about the false prophets who call upon dreams to flatter the rulers: "A prophet who has dreams, let him tell dreams; but whoever has My Word may preach My Word rightly." Dealing with dreams needs a lot of "discernment of the spirits"!

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3 "God does speak – now one way, now a second way – though no one perceives it. In dreams, in nightly visions, when deep sleep falls on people as they slumber in their beds, he may speak in their ears and terrify them with warnings, to turn them from wrongdoing and keep them from pride, to preserve them from the pit, their lives from perishing." (Job 33:14-18).

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2 *Conjectures*, 153-154.

The late US Benedictine nun Suzanne Zuercher, a clinical psychologist and a teacher of the Enneagram, compared dreams with photo negatives saying that whatever is light and in the center at daytime consciousness becomes dark in our dreams; the things we are rather unconscious of, however, become visible and call for our mindful attention.⁴ Paying attention to our dreams is first of all “shadow work” by overcoming the gap between our daytime self-image and “the other side” of ourselves that we tend to avoid.

Merton’s dream interpretations are reminiscent of Carl Gustav Jung’s approach. For C. G. Jung, most dreams serve to process the day that has gone. Additionally, Jung names “great”, archetypal, precognitive, repetitive, lucid and compensatory dreams. Merton interprets his own and other peoples’ dreams intuitively rather than methodically. Looking at his dream notes, however, one can say that his own dreams are outstanding examples of the manifestations of “archetypes”, especially the “anima” described by Jung.

For Jung, archetypes are basic structures of the collective human psyche. They are *a priori* and independent of any epochal and cultural formation. They exist in all human beings, and show themselves primarily in concrete dream images (and in many fairy tales), even though the details of those images may vary individually and culturally.⁵ The archetype of the shadow (not conscious or repressed soul parts), for example, can show

4 See Suzanne Zuercher, *Using the Enneagram in Prayer*. Out of print; German edition: *Ankommen im Einssein: Beten mit dem Enneagramm*, Munich 2009, 60. Suzanne Zuercher has also written a short biography of Thomas Merton as a “typical” Enneagram FOUR personality. The Enneagram is a psychological-spiritual typology describing nine basic patterns of human motivations and behaviour. Suzanne Zuercher, *Merton: An Enneagram Profile*, Indiana, 1969. See also Rohr’s and Ebert’s description of pattern FOUR in Thomas Merton: Richard Rohr and Andreas Ebert, *The Enneagram: A Christian Perspective*, New York 2001, 113f.

5 Compare Carl Gustav Jung: *Aion: Beiträge zur Symbolik des Selbst*. In: *Gesammelte Werke* 9/2, § 13.

itself as an emergence of a “dark double” or enemy. “Anima” and “animus” refer to opposite-sex parts and areas inside the soul of a man or of a woman. In dreams, Anima and Animus can appear bright and life-promoting but also dark and destructive. Archetypal symbols of the anima are, for example, the (inaccessible) ideal lover or – as in Merton’s anima dreams – *Sophia* (divine wisdom). The archetype of the “Self” is the center of the psyche, encompassing ego awareness as well as the unconscious, and representing the totality of the human soul. One sub-aspect of the Self that emerges toward the end of Merton’s life, especially in one of his “great dreams”, is the “Divine Child”.⁶

“Proverb”: Merton’s Anima

Shortly before his central vision in Louisville, Merton’s anima dreams begin to become prominent, dreams where female figures turn into signposts inviting him to grow. Each of these dreams marks a new level of transformation and integration.

As a young monk, Merton had developed a deep Marian devotion. His own stern mother had died when he was seven. The lack of maternal love had led him to grueling doubts regarding his own lovability and ability to love. But such a devotion to the Mother of God was overlaid by dogmatic theories such as the Immaculate Conception or the physical assumption of Mary into heaven, and therefore could only be a first step of healing the feminine in Merton. In his dreams, Mary is increasingly transformed into an aspect of the *Hagia Sophia*, the Holy Wisdom, the eternal feminine.

6 Carl Gustav Jung: *Aion: Beiträge zur Symbolik des Selbst*. In: *Gesammelte Werke* 9/2, §§ 43–126 and 287–418.

On February 28, 1958, just before the mystical vision in Louisville, Merton has the first of his "Proverb" dreams. It takes him to one of the places of his childhood, to Douglaston/Queens, where his mother's parents had lived:

*On a porch at Douglaston I am embraced with determined and virginal passion by a young Jewish girl. She clings to me and will not let me go, and I get to like the idea. I see that she is a nice kid in a plain, sincere sort of way. I reflect "She belongs to the same race as St. Anne." I ask her name and she says her name is Proverb. I tell her that is a beautiful and significant name, but she does not appear to like it – perhaps others have mocked her for it.*⁷

The porch is the traditional place of dating for (young) couples in the USA. At the same time, it is the threshold to the house. The embrace of Merton by the young Jewish girl of 14 years is not primarily sexually connoted, but (in Jung's terminology) an internal junction of the male and the female principle. The girl is called Proverb, "word of wisdom". This is an indicator that she manifests a specific aspect of the *Hagia Sophia*, Divine Wisdom, who is an emanation of God playing before the Creator from the beginning of the world.⁸

Proverb is to become Merton's spiritual guide in the following years. The fact that she does not like her name might indicate that initially there are

7 Thomas Merton, *A Search For Solitude*, Merton Journals Vol. III, 176.

8 "The Lord brought me forth as the first of his works, before his deeds of old; I was formed long ages ago, at the very beginning, when the world came to be. When there were no watery depths, I was given birth, when there were no springs overflowing with water; before the mountains were settled in place, before the hills, I was given birth, before he made the world or its fields or any of the dust of the earth. I was there when he set the heavens in place, when he marked out the horizon on the face of the deep, when he established the clouds above and fixed securely the fountains of the deep, when he gave the sea its boundary so the waters would not overstep his command, and when he marked out the foundations of the earth. Then I was constantly at his side. I was filled with delight day after day, rejoicing always in his presence, rejoicing in his whole world and delighting in mankind." (Proverbs 8:22-31).

still some elements of rejection of the feminine and the Jewish in Merton. We must recall that all "objects" and persons in a dream are first of all aspects and personifications of certain parts of the dreamer's personality. The dreamer then recalls that Proverb belongs to the same "race" [sic] as Saint Anne, the legendary grandmother of Jesus, whom Merton particularly venerated. Note that this dream is located on the threshold of the house of Merton's own grandmother. Even more remarkably, the virgin Mary was a Jewish girl and probably not much older than 14 when she received Jesus. She also was a "proverb", a manifestation of the eternal wisdom of God, Sophia. Proverb in Merton's dreams represents the human side of the Mother of God. Merton, soon after this dream, begins to write letters to his dream girl, Proverb. The first of these letters dates from March 4, 1958, four days after the dream itself had occurred:

*How grateful I am to you for loving in me something which I thought I had entirely lost, and someone who, I thought, I had long ago ceased to be. And in you, dear, though some people might be tempted to say you don't even exist, there is a reality as real and as wonderful and as precious as life itself [...] I think what I most want to say is that I treasure, in you, the revelation of your virginal solitude. In your marvelous, innocent, love you are utterly alone: yet you have given your love to me [...] Dearest Proverb, I love your name, its mystery, its simplicity and its secret, which even you yourself seem not to appreciate.*⁹

This dream marks Merton's growing willingness to accept and integrate the female, something his "hard" mother had prevented him from doing. Proverb's "virginal solitude" once again brings to mind the young Jewish girl Miriam/Mary. Merton had probably initiated the integration of the virginal anima Mary long ago when he entered the Trappist mo-

9 Thomas Merton, *A Search For Solitude*, Merton Journals Vol. III, 176.

nastery of Our Lady of Gethsemani and chose Mary as his second name as many Trappist monks used to do.

With a more conscious openness for his own female side, the older Merton is transforming from a world-denying heroic ascetic to a more serene "Mensch" and human being. Monk becomes man – and thus follows in the footsteps of God, who did not despise the world, but loved humanity and took on human flesh himself. A graffiti of the 1980s put it this way: "Do like God, become human!" The Proverb dreams and the Louisville experience unleash *joie de vivre* and an enormous creativity in Merton. In his last letter to Proverb, he writes on March 19, 1958:

I have kept one promise and I have refrained from speaking of you until seeing you again. I knew that when I saw you again it would be very different, in a different place, in a different form, in the most unexpected circumstances. I shall never forget our meeting yesterday. The touch of your hand makes me a different person. To be with you is rest and Truth. Only with you are these things found, dear child, sent to me by God.¹⁰

How this reunion happened, we cannot be sure – ether in other dreams not recorded or in encounters with women in Louisville. Shortly after his dream, Merton visits his painter friend Victor Hammer and is deeply captivated by a triptych Hammer has painted, depicting the coronation of a young man by a young woman. After this stirring experience he writes to Hammer: The "feminine principle in the universe is the inexhaustible source of the creative realization of the glory of the Father ..." ¹¹ This picture becomes the impetus for his own four-part poem *Hagia Sophia*, which is dedicated to the canonical hour prayers of Lauds, Prime, Terce, and Compline, and at the same time to the Blessed Mother, to Holy Wisdom and to the Eternal Female. At Pentecost 1961, this cycle is fi-

nally completed. The first part ("Dawn: The Hour of Lauds") contains what seems to be a clairvoyant vision of what Merton would experience in reality eight years later, in March 1966, through his encounter with the young nurse, Margie Smith:

There is in all visible things an invisible fecundity, a dimmed light, a meek namelessness, a hidden wholeness. This mysterious Unity and Integrity is Wisdom [...] This is at once my own being, my own nature, and the Gift of my Creator's Thought and Art within me, speaking as Hagia Sophia, speaking as my sister, Wisdom. I am awakened, I am born again at the voice of this my Sister, sent to me from the depths of the divine fecundity. Let us suppose I am a man lying asleep in a hospital [...] At five-thirty in the morning I am dreaming in a very quiet room when a soft voice awakens me from my dream [...]. It is like the One Christ awakening in all the separate selves that ever were separate and isolated and alone in all the lands of the earth [...] In the cool hand of the nurse there is the touch of all life, the touch of Spirit.¹²

The second part ("Early Morning. The Hour of Prime") describes Holy Wisdom as the incarcerated and silenced inner child:

We do not see the Child who is prisoner in all the people, and who says nothing. She smiles, for though they have bound her, she cannot be a prisoner. Not that she is strong, or clever, but simply that she does not understand imprisonment. [...] All that is sweet in her tenderness will speak to him on all sides in everything, without ceasing, and he will never be the same again. He will have awakened not to conquest and dark pleasure but to the impeccable pure simplicity of One consciousness in all and through all: one Wisdom, one Child, one Meaning, one Sister.

10 Thomas Merton, *A Search For Solitude*, Merton Journals Vol. III, 182.

11 Michael Mott, *The Seven Mountains of Thomas Merton*, Boston 1984), 312.

12 Thomas Merton, *Hagia Sophia*, mimeographed Typescript, Gethsemani/KY, 1962, without page numbers. Also see: <https://thevalueofsparrows.com/2013/08/16/poetry-hagia-sophia-by-thomas-merton/>

In the third part of the cycle, the reference, albeit indirect, to Lady Julian of Norwich, is notable. The 14th-century English recluse and visionary was the first one to refer to Jesus as “our mother”. She increasingly becomes Merton’s favorite saint, replacing the manly hero and saint of his young years, John of the Cross.¹³ Her message is love, a paternal-maternal God, who turns towards us unconditionally and mercifully – and nothing else. Lady Julian’s conclusion is more and more shared by Merton himself: “Everything will be well. And every manner of things will be well!”¹⁴ This trusting in the Happy End of everything can be found between the lines of the third passage (“High Morning. The Hour of Tierce”) of “Hagia Sophia”:

The Sun burns in the sky like the Face of God, but we do not know his countenance as terrible. His light is diffused in the air and the light of God is diffused by Hagia Sophia. [...] All the perfections of created things are also in God; and therefore He is at once Father and Mother. As Father He stands in solitary might surrounded by darkness. As Mother His shining is diffused, embracing all His creatures with merciful tenderness and light. The Diffuse Shining of God is Hagia Sophia. We call her His “glory.” In Sophia His power is experienced only as mercy and as love. (When the recluses of fourteenth-century England heard their Church Bells and looked out upon the wolds and fens under a kind sky, they spoke in their hearts to “Jesus our Mother.” It was Sophia that had awakened in their childlike hearts.)¹⁵

Finally, at sunset, in the fourth and final part of the cycle, in the hour of compline, the “Salve Regina” is heard, praising the heavenly Queen. Mary is for Merton “a personal manifestation of Sophia”. She is

not a Creator, and not a Redeemer, but perfect Creature, perfectly redeemed [...] It is she, it is Mary, Sophia, who in sadness and joy [...] sets upon the Second Person, the Logos, a crown which is His Human Nature [...] She crowns Him not with what is glorious, but with what is greater than glory: the one thing greater than glory is weakness, nothingness, poverty.¹⁶

Almost three years after the final draft of the Sophia poem, on March 10, 1964, one of Thomas Merton’s dreams reveals another aspect of Merton’s weak and wounded anima:

Last night I dreamed that a distinguished Lady Latinist came to give a talk to the novices on St. Bernard. Instead of a lecture, she sang in Latin meters, flexes and puncta [...] The novices were restive and giggled. This made me sad. In the middle of the performance the late abbot Dom Frederic, solemnly entered. We all stood. The singing was interrupted [...] Where did she come from, he asked. “Harvard”, I said in a stage whisper which she must have heard. Then the novices were all on a big semi, loaded on the elevator, I don’t know how, to go down from the top of the building. Instead of the Latinist coming on the elevator, I left the novices and escorted her down safely by the stairs: but now her clothes were all soiled and torn. She was confused and sad. She had no Latin and nothing much to say. I wonder what this dream is about. Is it about the Church? Is it about the liturgical revival ...¹⁷

16 Hagia Sophia

17 Thomas Merton, *Dancing in the Waters of Life*, Merton Journals, Vol. V, 89.

13 Thomas Merton, *Witness to Freedom*, New York 1994, 4.

14 In *Conjectures* Merton writes about Julian: “One of her most telling and central convictions is her orientation to what one might call an eschatological secret, the hidden dynamism which is at work already [...] Actually her life was lived in the belief in this “secret”, the “great deed” that the Lord will do on the Last day, not a deed of destruction and revenge, but of mercy and of life, all partial expectations will be exploded and everything will be made right.”, *Conjectures*, 210.

15 Hagia Sophia.

Indeed. Maybe the lady represents the old and venerable Roman Church before Vatican II. Merton himself loved the Latin liturgy. Until the end of his life he read the breviary in Latin, although in principle he affirmed most liturgical innovations. The tension between tradition and modernism is a permanent split in the Roman Church up until today. Merton experienced this tension in himself and suffered from it. He did not really succeed in overcoming *this* dualism. The late abbot represents a rigid, formalistic tradition that has no future. The singing Lady teacher, however, represents the mystical soul of tradition. The novices have lost touch with both aspects of tradition, giggling and crowding the “modern” elevator. Merton cannot integrate the Latinist Lady into the community, reconcile tradition and present. He leads the stained and ragged lady down the stairs and is a witness of the decline of both, tradition and modernity at the same time.¹⁸

Half a year later the face of his anima changes again. On November 19, 1964, Merton dreams of a Chinese princess:

Last night I had a haunting dream of a Chinese princess which stayed with me all day. (“Proverb” again) [...] This time she was with her “brothers”, and I felt overwhelmingly the freshness, the youth, the wonder, the truth of her; her complete reality, more real than any other, yet unobtainable. Yet I deeply felt the sense of her understanding, knowing and loving me, in my depths – not merely in my individuality and everyday self, yet not as if this self were utterly irrelevant to her. (Not rejected, not accepted either.)¹⁹

This dream probably marks Merton’s growing fascination for the spirituality of the Far East, especially for (originally Chinese) Zen Bud-

dhism. By 1962, Merton had begun to learn Chinese. Towards the end of his life, his soul is ready to overcome the dualism between West and East, Christianity and Buddhism. He corresponded with several spiritual teachers of the East. In this dream, he meets his Eastern anima, which again vitalizes him and invites him to continue to grow and mature while remaining creative and alive.

Merton’s last anima dream, on February 4, 1965, deals with the Mother archetype. Any access to “the mother” was blocked in Merton for a long time – or exclusively projected onto Mother Mary.

Last night I had a curious and moving dream about a “black mother.” I was in a place somewhere I had been as a child [...] I realized that I had come there for a reunion with a Negro foster mother whom I had loved in my childhood in the dream. Indeed it seemed, in the dream, that I owed my life to her [...], as if from her had come a new life [...] and what I recognized was not her face but the warmth of her embrace and of her heart, so to speak. Then we danced a little together, I and my black mother.

Merton meets in the dream a fictional black foster mother, which he never really had, but who had loved him in his dream consciousness more than his real mother. Her face is ugly and as stern as his mother’s, but warmth flows from her. Both hug and dance. The key is a mutual affection.

The message of Merton’s Anima dreams is integrative. It’s about the ever-expanding unity that Julian of Norwich had called “oneing”. With the Jewish girl, Proverb, it is the abolition of the Christian-Jewish and the male-female split, with the “Lady Latinist” it is the struggle for the reconciliation and integration of tradition and modernity in the church. The Chinese girl stands for the wedding of West and East. The black mother might represent the overcoming of racism, and is also an invitation

18 See also: Thomas Waldron, *The Wounded Heart of Thomas Merton*, New York/Mahwah 2011, 89ff.

19 Merton, *A Vow of Conversation*, New York 1988, 101.

to reconcile with the archetypal Mother. The black mother allows him to look beyond her ugly and stern facade. Merton feels warmth and affection, a love that presumably also lived in the heart of his physical mother, but which she had not been able to express.

The peak of Merton's anima integration is obviously the very real love between him and the young nurse Margie Smith, whom he met during one of his numerous hospital stays. Never before had Merton experienced such overwhelming love. This applies to the affairs of his early youth, including the woman with whom he had probably fathered a child he had never really cared for. Merton foreshadowed his love with M. in his Hagia Sophia cycle. The undeniable love for the young woman and her love for him awaken his creativity, vitality, and art of poetry. Love animates and confuses him. He would love to spend the rest of his life with M., but he is a celibate monk and she is engaged to someone else. He breaks the rules of the order anyway, makes secret phone calls with her, meets her. All of this may be his final step to his own "incarnation". This love is not just spiritual and platonic; it is erotic. Yet Merton knows that this love will be "amputated" before it really starts. For months they both struggle to see if and how they can somehow live this love. In the end, Merton painfully chooses the path of staying celibate; after this encounter however his own doubts about his lovability and loveability cease once and for all.

Wedding of East and West

The last dreams that Merton has written down no longer deal with his anima. His anima integration has exceeded its zenith with his concrete and real encounter with love although the Anima stays present in some of his dreams. Merton's longing for the unification of Western and Eastern spirituality becomes more prominent than ever before. At the beginning of his trip to Asia, Merton noted on November 5, 1968:

*Last night I dreamed that I was, temporarily, back at Gethsemani. I was dressed in a Buddhist monk's habit, but with more black and red and gold, a "Zen habit", in color more Tibetan than Zen [...] I met some women in the corridor, visitors and students of Asian religion, to whom I was explaining I was a kind of Zen monk and Gelugpa together, when I woke up.*²⁰

In this dream, the synthesis of East and West becomes manifest. Merton has understood that God can be found in many ways, and Christianity is only one of them. Merton remains a Christian and a monk of Gethsemani, and is at the same time a Buddhist. Interestingly, it is women again, anima figures, who are his conversation partners – in the hallway of a men's monastery! On the 19th of November, exactly three weeks before Merton's death, another dream follows which also deals with the unification of East and West:

*Last night I had a curious dream about Kanchenjunga. I was looking at the mountain and I was pure white, absolutely pure, especially the peaks that lie to the west [...] And I heard a voice saying – or got the clear idea of: "There is another side to the mountain." I realized that it was turned around and everything was lined up differently; I was seeing it from the Tibetan side [...] There is another side of Kanchenjunga and every mountain – the side that has never been photographed and turned into postcards. That is the only side worth seeing.*²¹

Here, again, the integration of opposites occurs. The invisible shadow side of things is the only side that is worth seeing. But it cannot be photographed and sold to tourists. Regarding Merton's analysis of Eastern re-

20 Merton, *The Other Side of the Mountain*, Journals Vol. VII, 255. The Gelug School is the youngest of the main schools of Tibetan Buddhism.

21 Journals VII, 284. Kanchenjunga is the third highest mountain on earth in the border region of Tibet.

ligiosity, this also means that in order to understand the whole, we must look at it from the unknown side, in this case from the eastern side.

The Divine Child and the Self

The "Inner Child" or the "Divine Child" are for Carl Gustav Jung sub-archetypes of the "Self". At the beginning of his *Conjectures of a Guilty Bystander* Merton reflects on a dream of the famous Swiss Reformed theologian Karl Barth. Several times Merton has dealt with Barth's world of ideas which in many ways was alien to his own views. Whether Barth was familiar with the world of Thomas Merton must be doubted. He never quoted or mentioned him. This dream seems to have been so important to Merton that he at a time wanted to call his entire book "Barth's Dream". Both, Barth and Merton, died in 1968 on the very same day, December 10: two of the greatest, yet very different teachers of Christian religion in the 20th century. This dream and its interpretation seem to say at least as much about Merton as about Barth:

Karl Barth had a dream about Mozart. Barth had always been piqued by the Catholicism of Mozart, and by Mozart's rejection of Protestantism. For Mozart said that "Protestantism was all in the head" and that "Protestants did not know the meaning of the Agnus Dei qui tollis peccata mundi." Barth, in his dream, was appointed to examine Mozart in theology. He wanted to make the examination as favorable as possible, and in his questions he alluded pointedly to Mozart's Masses. But Mozart did not answer a word.²²

The dream touches Thomas Merton. It seems to concern salvation, Barth's salvation, and his own. Barth loved and revered Mozart. He

could only begin his daily theological work after listening to Mozart music. Mozart, for Merton, embodies love, no abstract theological *Agape*, but *Eros*. Barth himself, who was actually averse to C. G. Jung's theory of archetypes, saw in Mozart a child, a "divine" child at work. The prodigy Mozart was never allowed to be a real child. But his playful and lustful "soul child" was very alive. Merton ends his dream interpretation:

Fear not, Karl Barth! Trust in the divine mercy. Though you have grown up to become a theologian, Christ remains a child in you. Your books (and mine) matter less than we might think! There is in us a Mozart who will be our salvation.

Without a lively contact with our inner child there is no wholeness and no self-realization possible. God became human as a baby child, and Jesus invites his disciples to become like children. This does not contradict Paul's statement of leaving childish naivité behind to become an adult ("When I was a child, I talked like a child. I thought like a child. I had the understanding of a child. When I became a man, I put childish ways behind me." 1 Corinthians 13:11), but it is another unification of opposites and the overcoming of the dualism between old and young (as in his first letter to "Proverb", Merton said he was not troubled by the age difference between her and himself). "The child is father of the man", as Wordsworth says in his famous poem, "The Rainbow". Union with the Divine Child is the goal and completion of becoming who we really are, our true selves.

Already in the early 1960s, Merton had a "Great Dream", pointing at the end and fulfillment of his own life. The dream is about the feast of the divine child in the human soul. In 1989, Melvyn Matthews dedicated a whole monograph to this one important dream.²³ It is a surreal ac-

22 *Conjectures*, 3.

23 Melvyn Matthews, *The Hidden Journey: Reflections On a Dream of Thomas Merton*, 1989.

count of being invited to a party, which turns out to be far across water, such that Merton needs to travel by boat. The feast is far away, and the way is arduous. Merton needs to cross the water that separates the visible sphere from the yet invisible world. The cruise cannot be bought with money, be it many dollars or francs, the currency that symbolizes Merton's childhood in France. There is no yacht from here to there; at best only a fishing boat. But even that cannot be moved at first. Merton suddenly realizes that he has to swim himself. There is no highway to heaven!

And I am swimming ahead in the beautiful magic water of the bay. From the clear depths of the water comes a wonderful life to which I am not entitled, a life and a power which I both love and fear. I know that by diving down into the water I can find wonders and joys, but that it is not for me to dive down; rather I must go to the other side; and I am indeed swimming to the other side. The other side is there. The end of the swim. The house is on the shore [...]. And I have arrived. I am out of the water. [...] I know the child will come, and He comes. The child comes and smiles. It is the smile of a Great One, hidden. He gives to me, in simplicity, two pieces of buttered white bread, the ritual and hieratic meal given to all who come to stay.²⁴

The dream points to Merton's completion. It is a "Great Dream", which at the same time has individual and collective significance. Everything that has made Merton's life livable and loveable, does not count anymore. The water is magical, wonderful and tempting. But this depth is not meant for the dreamer. He has a predetermined destination: the opposite shore. The wondrous and almost magical energy of the water carries him there. Before he reaches the place of the celebration and before the child comes he must play with a dog. The dog represents the instinctual,

24 *Conjectures*, 22f.

the savage, lust and passion, that needs to be tamed and integrated in a playful way. Only then can and will the child come. And He comes. Note the capital H! He is the divine child and at the same time an "old soul" with the hidden smile of a Great One. Another dualism to be bridged! Without saying a word the child serves his guest the Eucharistic yet ordinary gift of buttered white bread. The positive symbol of butter stands for vitality and success, maybe for everything that is summarized in the biblical Hebrew word "Shalom". This ritual is the ticket to the feast for those who "came to stay". A return trip is not planned. This feast is the end and completion of Merton's life, and the invitation to this feast applies to him and to all people: "I have arrived!"

Thomas Merton Center
Bellarmino University
2001 Newburg Road
Louisville, KY 40205