

Thomas Merton on Interreligious Dialogue

The final phase of Merton's long and evolving Spirituality



“He remains a source of spiritual inspiration and a guide for many people... Merton was above all a man of prayer, a thinker who challenged the certitudes of his time and opened new horizons for souls and for the Church. He was also a man of dialogue, a promoter of peace between peoples and religions.” - Pope Francis, address to Joint Session of Congress SEPTEMBER 24, 2015

“Whatever I may have written, I think all can be reduced in the end to this one truth, that God calls human persons to union with Himself and with one another in Christ.” -Thomas Merton - November 1963

Agenda

7:00	Opening Silence, Prayer and Introductions
7:15	Conference 1: Foundations - Background on Interreligious Dialogue, Thomas Merton's Life and Spiritual Journey
7:45	Conference 2: Merton's Opening to Interreligious Understanding
8:15	Break / Questions
8:25	Conference 3: Merton's Interreligious Insights
8:55	Final Reflections and Closing Prayer

Opening Prayer

“My Lord God, I have no idea where I am going. I do not see the road ahead of me. I cannot know for certain where it will end. Nor do I really know myself, and the fact that I think that I am following your will does not mean that I am actually doing so. But I believe that the desire to please you does in fact please you. And I hope I have that desire in all that I am doing. I hope that I will never do anything apart from that desire. And I know that if I do this you will lead me by the right road though I may know nothing about it. Therefore will I trust you always though I may seem to be lost and in the shadow of death. I will not fear, for you are ever with me, and you will never leave me to face my perils alone.” Amen! – Thoughts in Solitude

Introductions

1. Name
2. What is your Religious Tradition?
3. Why you are here? / What would you like to get out of the program?

Referenced Works:

Published while he was alive:

- The Seven Storey Mountain – Merton’s autobiography up to 1944 (1948)
- The Sign of Jonas (1953)
- Thoughts in Solitude (written mostly in 1953, published in 1959)
- No Man is an Island (1955)
- New Seeds of Contemplation (written 1961 - update Seeds of Contemplation)
- Seeds of Destruction (1964)
- **Gandhi on Non Violence (1965)**
- **Conjectures of a Guilty Bystander (1966)**
- **Mystics and Zen Masters (1967)**
- Faith and Violence (1968)
- **Zen and the Birds of Appetite (1968)**

Published posthumously:

- Contemplation in a World of Action (1971)
- **The Asian Journal of Thomas Merton (1973)**

Conference 1: Foundations – Background on Interreligious Dialogue and Thomas Merton’s Spiritual Journey

What is Dialogue?

To listen respectfully to others, to cultivate and speak your own voice, to suspend your opinions about others – these bring out the intelligence that lives at the very center of ourselves – the intelligence that exists when we are alert of possibilities around us and thinking freshly. – William Isaacs
Dialogue and the Art of Thinking

Stances of Interreligious Dialogue?

Humans are Spiritual creatures, it is something we all share at the core of who we are.

Openness to discover a Common Ultimate Reality (the Holy, the Sacred, the Divine, God) at the heart of each Faith.

We hold our own Faith reverently and with a certainty but loosely enough to respect and recognize that others have their own paths to Ultimate Reality which we may, ourselves, call God.

Dialogue is a combination of “head work” and “heart work”. InterFaith dialogue really doesn’t happen until heart speaks to heart.

Dialogue is never Debate, it is more like Communion.

A Modern Snapshot of the Worldwide Religions of the Human Family

Religion	Adherents (million)	%-age
Christianity	2,200	31.50%
Islam	1,600	22.32%
Secular/Nonreligious/ Agnostic/Atheist	1,100	15.35%
Hinduism	1,000	13.95%
Chinese traditional religion	394	5.50%
Buddhism	376	5.25%
Ethnic religions (other)	300	4.19%
African traditional religions	100	1.40%
Sikhism	23	0.32%
Spiritism	15	0.21%
Judaism	14	0.20%
Bahá'í	7.0	0.10%
Jainism	4.2	0.06%
Shinto	4.0	0.06%
Cao Dai	4.0	0.06%
Zoroastrianism	2.6	0.04%
Tenrikyo	2.0	0.02%
Neo-Paganism	1.0	0.01%
Unitarian Universalism	0.8	0.01%
Rastafarianism	0.6	0.01%
Total in 2012	7,167	100.00%

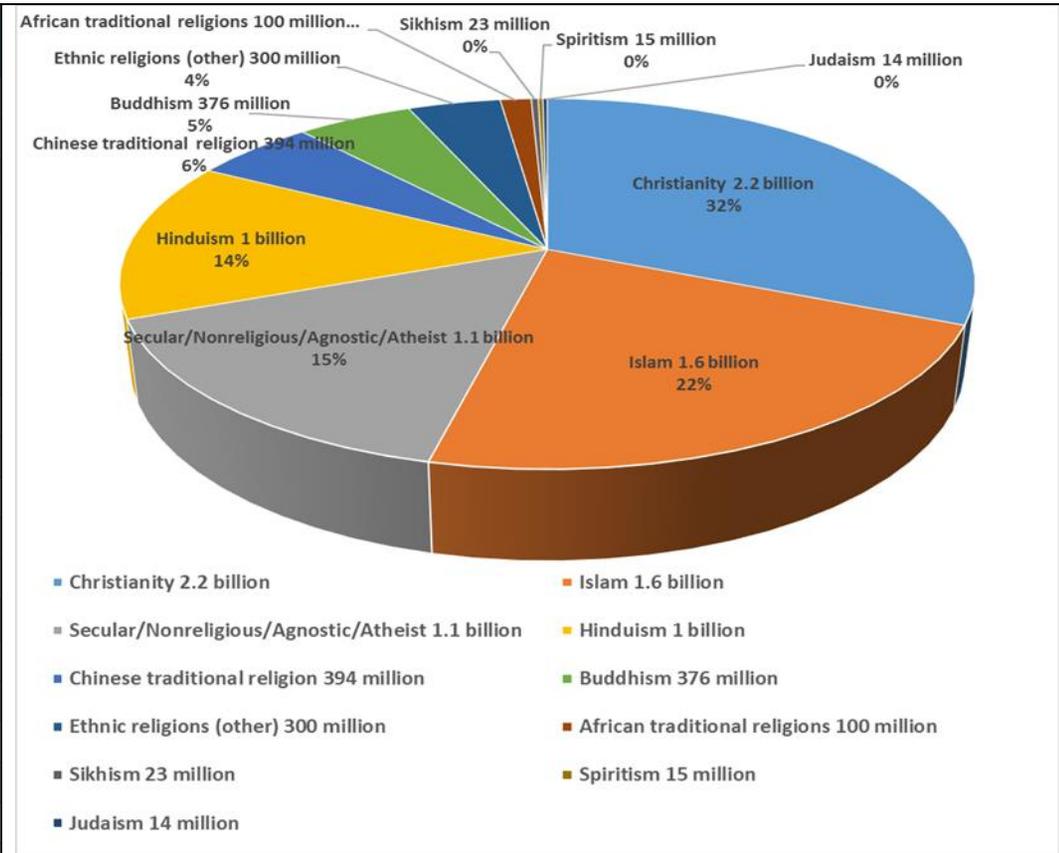


Figure 1. Religions of the Human Family

Christianity: 35,000+ Christian Denominations (2012); 1.1 Billion Roman Catholics, 265,000 Orthodox Christians, 835,000 Protestant Christians

Vatican Council II - Nostra Aetate, The Declaration on the Relation of the Church to Non-Christian Religions:

http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_decl_19651028_nostra-aetate_en.html

Dated and proclaimed by Pope Paul VI on October 28, 1965

Part 1 – 2:

In our time, when day by day mankind is being drawn closer together, and the ties between different peoples are becoming stronger, the Church examines more closely her relationship to non-Christian religions. In her task of promoting unity and love among men, indeed among nations, she considers above all in this declaration what men have in common and what draws them to fellowship.

One is the community of all peoples, one their origin, for God made the whole human race to live over the face of the earth. One also is their final goal, God. His providence, His manifestations of goodness, His saving design extend to all men, until that time when the elect will be united in the Holy City, the city ablaze with the glory of God, where the nations will walk in His light.

Men expect from the various religions answers to the unsolved riddles of the human condition, which today, even as in former times, deeply stir the hearts of men...

From ancient times down to the present, there is found among various peoples a certain perception of that hidden power which hovers over the course of things and over the events of human history; at times some indeed have come to the recognition of a Supreme Being, or even of a Father. This perception and recognition penetrates their lives with a profound religious sense. ... religions found everywhere try to counter the restlessness of the human heart, each in its own manner, by proposing "ways," comprising teachings, rules of life, and sacred rites. The Catholic Church rejects nothing that is true and holy in these religions. She regards with sincere reverence those ways of conduct and of life, those precepts and teachings which, though differing in many aspects from the ones she holds and sets forth, nonetheless often reflect a ray of that Truth which enlightens all men. Indeed, she proclaims, and ever must proclaim Christ "the way, the truth, and the life" (John 14:6), in whom men may find the fullness of religious life, in whom God has reconciled all things to Himself.

The Church, therefore, exhorts her sons, that through dialogue and collaboration with the followers of other religions, carried out with prudence and love and in witness to the Christian faith and life, they recognize, preserve and promote the good things, spiritual and moral, as well as the socio-cultural values found among these men.

Part 5:

We cannot truly call on God, the Father of all, if we refuse to treat in a brotherly way any man, created as he is in the image of God. Man's relation to God the Father and his relation to men his brothers are so linked together that Scripture says: "He who does not love does not know God" (1 John 4:8).

No foundation therefore remains for any theory or practice that leads to discrimination between man and man or people and people, so far as their human dignity and the rights flowing from it are concerned.

The Church reproves, as foreign to the mind of Christ, any discrimination against men or harassment of them because of their race, color, condition of life, or religion. On the contrary, following in the footsteps of the holy Apostles Peter and Paul, this sacred synod ardently implores the Christian faithful to "maintain good fellowship among the nations" (1 Peter 2:12), and, if possible, to live for their part in peace with all men, so that they may truly be sons of the Father who is in heaven.

Thomas Merton – An Outline of a life’s deep spiritual journey

Key Time Periods:

1. Descent to Hell, through Purgatory and into Heaven (1915 – 1949) -- 34 years
2. From Darkness to Light (1949 – 1958) – 9 years
3. Reengaging the World (1958 – 1968) – 10 years
4. We are all One – Interreligious Dialogue and Writings (1959 – 1968) – 9 years

Highlights:

- Born in France during World War 1 on January 31 1915, parents were Artists (mother Ruth Jenkins was an American Quaker and father Owen Merton was an Anglican from New Zealand.)
- Loses his family throughout his early years
 - Mother dies from cancer when he was 6 (1921)
 - Father dies from brain tumor when he was 16 (1931)
 - Maternal Grandfather dies in 1936 and Maternal Grandmother dies in 1937
 - Only Brother dies in World War II in 1943
 - His Friends, Trappist Community, Catholic Faith and the World become his family.
- Lived in various places; little real stability
 - Moves to Long Island, NY in August 1915 (provides periodic stability)
 - After his mother dies, he moves around. Small trips with his father to Cape Cod, Bermuda but was often absent as he went on trips to pursue his painting career. Tom moves to France 1925 then England 1928.
- Higher Education
 - In the fall of 1933 He entered Cambridge and had a miserable year, ignored his classes, drank excessively and hung out at public classes, spent way too much money, was very free sexually and probably fathered a child. Left Cambridge in Spring 1934
 - In May, Merton returned to live with his Grandparents in Long Island. Enrolled in Columbia University in January 1935 as a sophomore and his life began to, slowly, turn around.
 - Two professors became his life-long mentors, Mark Van Doren (a professor of English Literature) and Dan Walsh (professor of Philosophy) – his early Spiritual Confidant.
 - Found a group of (lifetime) friends on the staff of the Columbia School Newspapers, the Jester and the Columbia Review as well as the yearbook. Received B.A. in English in 1938.
 - In 1939 he received his M.A. in literature and also applied to become a Franciscan but was turned down.

- Finds Catholicism
 - His reading turned more and more toward Catholicism (1937) and a pull toward God. He started attending Church and then formally asked to become a Catholic at Corpus Christi church where he was baptized on November 16, 1938.
 - Felt a strong attraction to the Priesthood; applied but failed to be accepted by the Franciscans in 1940.
 - In September 1940, Merton began to teach English at St. Bonaventure College in Olean NY and lead a personally devout life.
 - In the summer of 1941, spent 2 weeks volunteering at Catherine de Hueck's Friendship House in Harlem which had a profound impact on him.
 - In April 1941 went to Our Lady of Gethsemani Monastery for a Holy Week Retreat, returned on December 10, 1941 and waited to be accepted into the Trappists
 - The Original Monk's schedule:
 - 2:00 am Monks arise
 - 2:30 am Time for personal prayer
 - 3:00 am Vigils
 - 4:00 am Priest Monks say Private Masses, others go to Communion Mass with time for personal prayer afterwards
 - 5:30 am Canonical Hour of Prime, followed by Chapter with the Abbot, go to dormitory to make beds and refectory for a cup of coffee and two slices of dry bread.
 - 7:45 am Terce with High Mass followed by Sext and two hours of manual labor, examination of conscience and dinner
 - None followed by period of rest and two more hours of work.
 - 4:30 pm Vespers followed by a period of quiet prayer and a small meal.
 - 7:30 pm Compline concluded with the signing of Salve Regina, receive Abbot's blessing and off to bed.
- Path to Priesthood (a pinnacle experience)
 - Obtains the habit of a choir-monk novice and given name of Mary Louis – February 21, 1941
 - Takes Simple vows – March 19, 1944
 - Pronounces Solemn vows – March 19, 1947
 - Ordained a priest on May 26, 1949 – a pinnacle experience
 - Began to experience the struggle of wanting more solitude
- Applied for U.S Citizenship (1/5/1949)
 - Became U.S. Citizen in 1951
- Assigned responsibility for others:
 - Master of Scholastics (Students for the Priesthood): 1951 - 1955
 - Master of Novices: 1955 – 1965

- Develops a Mature, Individualized and Personal Catholic Spirituality.
 - Develops Faith through trials of uncertainty and questions
 - Most of his deeply Christian Spiritual writing is done in this period

- Turns from a World denying mystic to one that deeply embraces the world.
 - Experiences mystical “epiphany” at the corner of 4th and Walnut. (1958)
 - Increased interest in Racial issues and pacifism (1961)
 - Involved with Catholic Peace groups in Opposition to Vietnam War (1965)
 - Letters to and visits from countless activists
 - Writing about Social Justice, Racism, Civil Rights, Peace, War, Violence, Non Violence and Nuclear Weapons
 - Disallowed to write about certain issues involving peace so wrote Cold War letters to friends instead.
 - Identified as a radical, reckless and might be misleading some poor souls. Some of his public wanted him to “remain the writer of the Seven Storey Mountain.”

- Sought a more solitary life:
 - Given use of wooden toolshed, which he named St. Anne’s, as a place of solitude – 1953
 - Moved into Hermitage – August 1965
 - Hermitage schedule:
 - 2:15 am rise, Lauds followed by meditation
 - 5:00 am breakfast followed by Lectio
 - 7:30 am Prime and rosary
 - 8:00 am Manual work, chores, etc
 - 9:30 am Terce, Sext, None then to monastery for private Mass followed by thanksgiving and part of the psalter, dinner at infirmary refectory then return to hermitage; siesta or light reading.
 - 1:00 pm Vespers
 - 2:15 pm writing, work or walk
 - 4:15 pm Vigils
 - 5:00 pm Supper followed by Compline
 - 6:00 pm New Testament, meditation, examen
 - 7:00 pm Retire

- Brief but intense romantic interlude with Marjorie, a 19-year old nurse in Louisville (1966)
 - Brief but intense love affair that was broken off.
 - Reaffirmed his monastic vows
 - Abbot treats it as a matter of fact: “He fell in love, these things happen”.
 - Proved that he could genuinely love and be loved by a woman.

- Active Correspondence, Outreach and Writing on Non-Christian faiths – in conjunction with Vatican Council II
 - Began his reading these in the late 1950’s
 - Judaism, Islam (Sufism), Taoism, Hinduism and Buddhism

- Incorporated his growing knowledge in lessons with Novices
- Deep interest in monastic renewal which spurred his interest in Buddhism

- Visits with Famous Buddhists
 - Visit D.T. Suzuki – Zen Scholar at Columbia (1964)
 - Vietnamese Buddhist monk Thich Nhat Hahn visits monastery and makes enormous impression on Merton (1966)
 - Visits Dalai Lama – 1968
 - Dalai Lama writes of Merton: I could see he 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... It was Merton who introduced me to the real meaning of the word “Christian.”

- Final Pilgrimage to the Far East to attend first Asian East-West Intermonastic Conference in Bangkok
 - Leaves Abbey on 9/10/1968
 - Visits India, Sri-Lanka (Ceylon) and Thailand
 - Addresses Calcutta Spiritual Summit Conference on 10/23/1968
 - Addresses Intermonastic Conference and dies in Bangkok on 12/10/1968

Conference 2: Merton's Opening to Interreligious Dialogue and Communion with others

Important Events and Phases to Merton's Interreligious Development

- Experiencing God, True Prayer and the Communion of Saints in Rome (1933)
- Finding a compelling Catholic Image of God (1937)
- Friendship with and Encouragement of Hindu Dr. Baramachari; Initial encounter with Oriental Religion confuses him (1937 - 1938)
- Escapes the World, Becomes a Monk and a Priest (1941 – 1949)
- Merton's emerges from his Dark Night struggle with a deeply personal Faith (1949 – 1953)
- Merton's Experiences and Reflections on Personal Connections (1958 - 1966)
- Final Mystical Realization at Polonnaruwa (1968)

Excerpts

Seven Storey Mountain - Rome 1933: Experiencing God and the Communion of Saints pg 119:

After about a week... I found myself looking into churches rather than ruined temples. ... And thus without knowing anything about it I became a pilgrim. ... For these mosaics and frescoes and all the ancient altars and thrones and sanctuaries were designed and built for the instruction of people who were not capable of immediately understanding anything higher... These mosaics told me more than I had ever known of the doctrine of a God of infinite power, wisdom and love. Who had yet become Man, and reveled in His Manhood the infinity of power, wisdom and love that was His Godhead. Of course I could not grasp and believe these things explicitly...

I was in my room. It was night. The light was on. Suddenly it seemed to me that Father, who had now been dead more than a year, was there with me. The sense of his presence was as vivid and as real and as startling as if he had touched my arm or spoken to me... And I think for the first time in my whole life I really began to pray – praying not with my lips and with my intellect and my imagination, but praying out of the very roots of my life and of my being, and praying to the God I had never known, to reach down towards me out of His darkness and to help me to get free of the thousand terrible things that held my will in their slavery. There were a lot of tears connected with this...When I got back to New York I lost my temporary interest in religion.

Seven Storey Mountain - Finding a compelling Image of God (1937): pp 187 – 190:

... in Scribner's window, I saw a book called *The Spirit of Medieval Philosophy*... the feeling of disgust and deception struck me like a knife in the pit of my stomach... They should have warned me that this was a Catholic book! ... You must understand that while I admired Catholic culture, I had always been afraid of the Catholic Church... the imprimatur told me that what I read would be in full conformity with that fearsome and mysterious thing, Catholic Dogma, and the fact struck me with an impact against which everything in me reacted with repugnance and fear. Now in the light of all this, I consider that it was surely a real grace that, instead of getting rid of the book, I actually read it.... And the one big concept which I got of its pages was something that was to revolutionize my whole life, the word *aseitas*. In this one word, ... I discovered

an entirely new concept of God – a concept which showed me at once that the belief of Catholics was by no means the vague and rather superstitious hangover from an unscientific age that I had believed it to be. On the contrary, here was a notion of God that was at the same time deep, precise, simple, and accurate and, what is more, charged with implications which I could not ever begin to appreciate, but which I could at least dimly estimate, ... Aseitas – the English equivalent is a transliteration: aseity – simply means the power of a being to exist absolutely in virtue of itself, not as caused by itself, but as requiring no cause, no other justification for its existence except that its very nature is to exist. There can be only one such Being: that is God. And to say that God exists *a se*, of and by and by reason of Himself, is merely to say that God is Being Itself. ... He is the pure act of existing ...

Seven Storey Mountain - Friendship with Dr. Baramachari, pp 214 - 217: (1938)

I became very fond of Bramachari, and he of me. 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 a life that was centered, as his was, on God. The thing that strikes me now is that he never attempted to explain his own religious beliefs to me – except some of the externals of the cult, and that was later on. He would no doubt tell me all that I wanted to know, if I had asked him, but I was not curious enough... He used to tell us how far India was from conversion to Protestantism – or Catholicism for that matter. One of the chief reasons he gave for the failure of any Christian missionaries to really strike deep into the tremendous populations of Asia was the fact that they maintained themselves on a social level that was too far above the natives... all Christian missionaries, according to him, suffered from this big drawback: they lived too well, too comfortably. They took care of themselves in a way that simply made it impossible for the Hindus to regard them as holy... According to Bramachari, the prevailing impression among the Hindus seems to be that Christians don't know what asceticism means. The Hindus are not looking for us to send them men who will build schools and hospitals... they want to know if we have any saints to send them.... the one counsel he did give me is something that I will not easily forget: "There are many beautiful mystical books written by Christians. You should read St. Augustine's *Confessions* and *The Imitation of Christ*." ... "Yes you must read those books." ... Now that I look back on those days, 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. After all, it is rather ironical that I had turned, spontaneously to the east, in reading about mysticism, as if there were little or nothing in the Christian tradition... So now I was told that I ought to turn to the Christian tradition, to St. Augustine – and told by a Hindu monk!

Seven Storey Mountain - Reflections on Reading about Oriental Religions, pp 204 - 205: (1937 - 1938)

But the most important effect of the book (Aldous Huxley's *Ends and Means*) on me was to make me start ransacking the university library for books on Oriental mysticism... I have forgotten the titles, even the authors, and I never understood a word of what they said in the first place. I had the habit of reading fast, without stopping, or stopping only rarely to take a note, and all these mysteries would require a great deal of thought, even were a man who knew something about them to puzzle them out. And I was completely unfamiliar with anything of the kind... Ultimately, I suppose all Oriental mysticism can be reduced to... (being) purely in the natural order. That does not make it evil, *per se*, according to Christian standards, but it does not make it good, in relation to the supernatural. It is simply more or less useless...

Entering the Monastery: Seven Storey Mountain (December, 1941) pg 410:

So Brother Matthew locked the gate behind me and I was enclosed in the four walls of my new freedom. And it was appropriate that the beginning of freedom should be as it was. For I entered a garden that was stripped and bare. The flowers that had been there last April were all gone. The sun was hidden behind low clouds and an icy wind was blowing over the grey grass and the concrete walks. In a sense my freedom had already begun, for I minded none of these things.

Ordination Sign of Jonas – part 4 To the Altar of God pg 181: (May, 1949)

My priestly ordination was, I felt, the one great secret for which I had been born. Ten years before I was ordained, when I was in the world, and seemed to be one of the men in the world most unlikely to become a priest, I had suddenly realized that for me ordination to the priesthood was, in fact, a matter of life or death, heaven or hell... It permanently transformed my ordinary, everyday life. It was a transfiguration of all simple and usual things, an elevation of the plainest and most natural acts to the level of the sublime. ... To love God is everything. And Love is enough. Nothing else is of any value except insofar as it is transformed and elevated by the charity of Christ.

Sign of Jonas – part 5 (pg 230):

Ordination is only the beginning of a journey, not its end. The beginning was easy and pleasant. But when summer was over the serious business of being a priest began... I found myself face to face with a mystery that was beginning to manifest itself in the depths of my soul and to move me with terror...

Sign of Jonas - June 13, 1951 (pg 328):

It is sometime in June... In any case every day is the same for me because I have become very different from what I used to be. The man who began this journal is dead, just as the man who finished *The Seven Storey Mountain*, when this journal began was also dead, and what is more the man who was the central figure in *The Seven Storey Mountain* was dead over and over. And now that all these men are dead, ... Because writing down what *The Seven Storey Mountain* was about was sufficient to get it off my mind for good.

Sign of Jonas (Personal Experience) – Prologue – pg 8:

“Technical language, though it is universal and certain and accepted by theologians, does not reach the average man and does not convey what is most personal and most vital in religious experience. Since my focus is not upon dogmas as such, but only on their repercussions in the life of a soul in which they being to find a concrete realization, I may be pardoned for using my own words to talk about my own soul.

Sign of Jonas – Epilogue Fire Watch July 4, 1952

The symbolic typology, which is sustained throughout the "Fire Watch," involves an antithetical juxtaposition of day and night, each with its cumulative secondary associations. With the night Merton associates the eternal abyss, the fecund darkness of the soul, and the blissful silence and solitude that permit an emerging sense of contact with the transcendent. The day he associates with the intellect and reason, language and speech, the desire for clarity, and the articulation of meaning. The antithetical motifs of light and darkness are nourished, from a narrative point of view, by the concrete particulars of Merton's progress as watchman and by the injection of wit and paradox. Paradox appears, for example, in the observation that night and darkness bring a "semblance of order before all things disappear" (349), a reversal of the conventional perception of day and night. **The daytime, filled with external movement and declared purposes, is granted only a shallow**

kind of order alongside the immensity of the night, which allows the mind, now able to set aside its tasks, to focus on ultimate realities.

Pg 352:

The fire watch is an examination of conscience in which our task as watchman suddenly appears in its true light: a pretext devised by God to isolate you, and to search your soul with lamps and questions, in the heart of darkness. God, my God Whom I meet in darkness, with You it is always the same thing! Always the same question that nobody knows how to answer! I have prayed to You in the daytime with thoughts and reasons, and in the nighttime You have confronted me, scattering thought and reason. I have come to You in the morning with light and with desire, and You have descended upon me, with great gentleness, with most forbearing silence, in this inexplicable night, dispersing light, defeating all desire. I have explained to You a hundred times my motives for entering the monastery and You have listened and said nothing, and I have turned away and wept in shame. It is true that all my motives have meant nothing? Is it true that all my desires were an illusion? While I am asking questions which You do not answer, You ask me a question which is so simple that I cannot answer. I do not even understand the question. This night, and every night, it is the same question.

Pg 354:

On all sides I am confronted by questions that I cannot answer, because the time for answering them has not yet come. Between the silence of God and the silence of my own soul, stand the silence of the souls entrusted to me. Immersed in these three silences, I realize that the questions I ask myself about them are perhaps no more than a surmise. And perhaps the most urgent and practical renunciation is the renunciation of all questions.

Pg 356:

Now is the time to get up and go to the tower. Now is the time to meet You, God, where the night is wonderful, where the roof is almost without substance under my feet, where all the mysterious junk in the belfry consider the proximate coming of three new bells, where the forest opens out under the moon and the living things sing terribly that only the present is eternal and that all things having a past and a future are doomed to pass away!

pp 360 – 361:

And now my whole being breathes the wind which blows through the belfry, and my hand is on the door through which I see the heavens. The door swings out upon a vast sea of darkness and of prayer. Will it come like this, the moment of my death? Will You open a door upon the great forest and set my feet upon a ladder under the moon, and take me out among the stars? ... Although I see the stars, I no longer pretend to know them. Although I have walked in those woods, how can I claim to love them? One by one I shall forget the names of individual things. You, Who sleep in my breast, are not met with word, but in the emergence of life within life and of wisdom with wisdom. You are found in communion: Thou in me and I in Thee and Thou in them and they in me: dispossessions within dispossessions, dispassion within dispassion, emptiness within emptiness, freedom within freedom. I am alone. Thou art alone. The Father and I are One.

Thoughts in Solitude (1953):

pp 34-35 – **What does it mean to know and experience my own “nothingness”? It is not enough to turn away in disgust from my illusions and faults and mistakes, to separate myself from them as if they were not, and as if I were someone other than myself. This kind of self-annihilation is only a worse illusion, it is a pretended humility which by saying “I am nothing” I mean in effect “I wish I were not what I am.” ... To really know our ‘nothingness’ we must also love it. And we cannot love it unless we see that it is good. And we cannot see that it is good unless we accept it. To love our “nothingness” in this way, we must repudiate nothing that is our own, nothing that we have, nothing that we are. We must see and admit that it is all ours and that it is all good: good in its positive entity since it come from God: good in our deficiency, since our helplessness, even our moral misery, our spiritual, attracts to us the mercy of God.**

Pg 37 -- **The spiritual life is first of all a life. It is not merely something to be known and studied, it is to be lived... If we are to become spiritual, we must remain men. And if there were not evidence of this everywhere in theology, the Mystery of the Incarnation itself would be ample proof of it... If we want to be spiritual, then, let us first of all live our lives.**

Pg 124 –**The further I advance into solitude the more clearly I see the goodness of all things. In order to live happily in solitude I must have a compassionate knowledge of the goodness of other men, a reverent knowledge of the goodness of all creation and a humble knowledge of the goodness of my own body and of my own soul. How can I live in solitude if I do not see everywhere the goodness of God, my Creator and Redeemer and the Father of all good?**

pg 127 – **Only solitude has taught me that I do not have to be a god or an angel to be pleasing to You, that I do not have to become pure intelligence without feeling and without human imperfection before You will listen to my voice. You do not wait for me to become great before You will be with me and hear me and answer me. It is my lowliness and my humanness that have drawn You to make me Your equal by condescending to my level and living in me by Your merciful care.**

No Man is an Island – Author’s Note and Prologue. (1955):

I only desire in this book to share with the reader my own reflections on certain aspects of the spiritual life. I consider that the spiritual life is the life of man’s real self, the life of that interior self whose flame is too often allowed to be smothered under the ashes of anxiety and futile concern. The spiritual life is oriented toward God, rather than toward the immediate satisfaction of the material needs of life... On the contrary, without a life of the spirit, our whole existence becomes unsubstantial and illusory. The life of the spirit, by integrating us in the real order established by God, put us in the fullest possible contact with reality – not as we imagine it, but as it really is. It does so by making us aware of our own real selves, and placing them in the presence of God.

The meditations in this book are intended to be at the same time traditional and modern and my own. I do not intend to divorce myself at any point from Catholic tradition. But neither do I intend to accept points of that tradition blindly and without understanding, and without making them really my own. For it seems to me that the first responsibility of a man of faith is to make his faith really part of his own life, not by rationalizing it but by living it... They do not always pretend to be final answers to final questions, nor do they even claim to face those questions in the most fundamental possible terms. But at least I can hope they are thoughts that I have honestly thought out for myself and that, for better or for worse, mean

something in my own life and in the lives of those I live with. They point, therefore, toward what seems to me to be the meaning of life... They are simply observations of a few things that seem to me to matter. If there is a thread of unity running through them all, I should say it was the following idea: What every man looks for in life is his own salvation and the salvation of the men he lives with. By salvation I mean first of all the full discovery of who he himself really is. Then I mean something of the fulfillment of his own God-given powers, in the love of others and of God. I mean also the discovery that he cannot find himself in himself alone, but that he must find himself in and through others.

Conjectures of a Guilty Bystander, Fourth and Walnut experience: pg 153 – 154 (1958)

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 those 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. The whole illusion of a separate holy existence is a dream. Not that I question the reality of my vocation, or of my monastic life: but the conception of “separation from the world” that we have in the monastery too easily presents itself as a complete illusion: the illusion that by making vows we become a different species of being, pseudo-angels, “spiritual men,” men of interior life, what have you.

...we are in the same world as everybody else, the world of the bomb, the world of race hatred, the world of technology, the world of mass media, big business, revolution, and all the rest. We take a different attitude to all these things, for we belong to God. Yet so does everybody else belong to God. We just happen to be conscious of it, and to make a profession out of this consciousness...

It is a glorious destiny to be a member of the human race, though it is a race dedicated to many absurdities and one which makes many terrible mistakes: yet, with all that, God Himself gloried in becoming a member of the human race. A member of the human race! To think that such a commonplace realization should suddenly seem like news that one holds the winning ticket in a cosmic sweepstakes.

I have the immense joy of being man, a member of a race in which God Himself became incarnate. As if the sorrows and stupidities of the human condition could overwhelm me, now that I realize what we all are. And if only everybody could realize this! But it cannot be explained. There is no way of telling people that they are all walking around shining like the sun...

Then it was as if I suddenly saw the secret beauty of their hearts, the depths of their hearts where neither sin nor desire nor self-knowledge can reach, the core of their reality, the person that each one is in God's eyes. If only they could all see themselves as they really are. If only we could see each other that way all the time. There would be no more war, no more hatred, no more cruelty, no more greed... But this cannot be seen, only believed and “understood” by a peculiar gift.

... At the center of our being is a point of nothingness which is untouched by sin and by illusion, a point of pure truth, a point or spark which belongs entirely to God, which is never at our disposal, from which God disposes of our lives, which is inaccessible to the fantasies of our own mind or the brutalities of our own will. This little point of nothingness and of absolute poverty is the pure glory of God in us. It is so to speak His name written in us in our poverty, as our indigence, as our dependence, as our sonship. It is like a pure diamond, blazing with the invisible light of heaven. It is in everybody, and if we could see it we would see these billions of points of light coming together in the face and blaze of a sun that would make all the

darkness and cruelty of life vanish completely... I have no program for this seeing. It is only given. But the gate of heaven is everywhere.

New Seeds of Contemplation pp 292 – 296: (1961)

The Lord would not only love His creation as a Father, but He would enter into His creation, emptying Himself, hiding Himself, as if He were not God but a creature. ... For in becoming man, God became not only Jesus Christ but also potentially every man and woman that ever existed. In Christ, God became not only “this” man, but also, in a broader and more mystical sense, yet no less truly, “every man”. The presence of God in His world as its Creator depends on no one but Him. His presence in the world as Man depends, in some measure, upon men... we are able to decide whether we ourselves, and that portion of the world which is ours, shall become aware of His presence, consecrated by it, and transfigured in its light... It is possible to speak of the exterior self as a mask... The mask that each man wears may well be a disguise not only for man’s inner self but for God, wandering as a pilgrim and exile in His own creation. And indeed, if Christ became Man, it is because He wanted to be any man and every man. If we believe in the Incarnation of the Son of God, there should be no one on earth in whom we are not prepared to see, in mystery, the presence of Christ.

Faith and Violence, pp 106-108, **Nhat Hanh is My Brother**: (1968)

... He is more my brother than many who are nearer to me by race and nationality, because he and I see things exactly the same way... We are both monks, and we lived the monastic life about the same number of years. We are both poets, both existentialists. I have far more in common with Naht Hahn than I have with many Americans, and I do not hesitate to say it. It is vitally important that such bonds be admitted. They are the bonds of a new solidarity and a new brotherhood which is beginning to be evident on all the five continents and which cuts across all political, religious and cultural lines to unite young men and women in every country in something that is more concrete than an ideal and more alive than a program...

The Asian Journal Polonnaruwa – December 4, 1968 (pg 233) – An Experience of Transcendence.

The vicar general, shying away from “paganism,” hangs back and sits under a tree reading the guidebook. I am able to approach the Buddhas barefoot and undisturbed, my feet in wet grass, wet sand. Then the silence of the extraordinary faces. The great smiles. Huge and yet subtle. Filled with every possibility, questioning nothing, knowing everything, rejecting nothing, the peace not of emotional resignation but of Madhyamika, of sunyata, that has seen through every question without trying to discredit anyone or anything—without refutation—without establishing some other argument. For the doctrinaire, the mind that needs well-established positions, such peace, such silence, can be frightening.

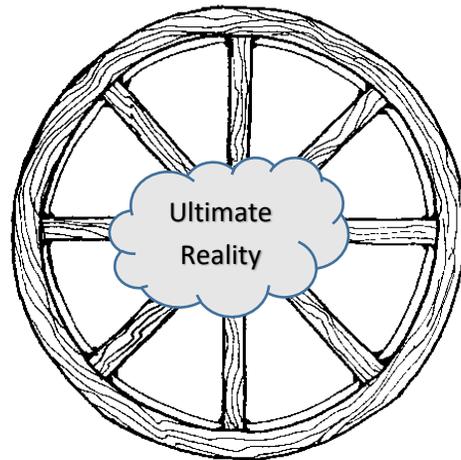
I was knocked over with a rush of relief and thankfulness at the obvious clarity of the figures, the clarity and fluidity of shape and line, the design of the monumental bodies composed into the rock shape and landscape figure, rock and tree. And the sweep of bare rock sloping away on the other side of the hollow, where you can go back and see different aspects of the figures.

Looking at these figures I was suddenly, almost forcibly, jerked clean out of the habitual, half-tied vision of things, and an inner clearness, clarity, as if exploding from the rocks themselves, became evident and obvious...

The thing about all this is that there is no puzzle, no problem, and really no “mystery.” All problems are resolved and everything is clear, simply because what matters is clear. The rock, all matter, all life, is charged with dharmakaya ... everything is emptiness and everything is compassion. I don’t know when in my life I have ever had such a sense of beauty and spiritual validity running together in one aesthetic illumination. Surely, with Mahabalipuram and Polonnaruwa my Asian pilgrimage has come clear and purified itself. I mean, I know and have seen what I was obscurely looking for. I don’t know what else remains but I have now seen and have pierced through the surface and have got beyond the shadow and the disguise. This is Asia in its purity, not covered over with garbage, Asian or European or American, and it is clear, pure, complete. It says everything; it needs nothing. And because it needs nothing it can afford to be silent, unnoticed, undiscovered. It does not need to be discovered. It is we, Asians included, who need to discover it.



Conference 3: Merton's Interreligious Insights



Mystics and Zen Masters – Contemplation and Dialogue pp 204 – 205:

... genuine ecumenism requires the communication and sharing, not only of information about doctrines which are totally and irrevocably divergent, but also of religious intuitions and truths which may turn out to have something in common, beneath surface differences. Ecumenism seeks the inner and ultimate spiritual “ground” which underlies all articulated differences. A genuinely fruitful dialogue cannot be content with a polite diplomatic interest in other religions and their beliefs. It seeks a deeper level, on which religious traditions have always claimed to bear witness to a higher and more personal knowledge of God than that which is contained simply in exterior worship and formulated doctrine. In all religions we encounter not only the claim to (divine) revelation in some form or other, but also the record of special experiences in which the absolute and final validity of that revelation is in some way attested. Furthermore, in all religions it is more or less generally recognized that this profound “sapiential” experience, call it gnosis, contemplation, “mysticism”, “prophecy”, or what you will, represents the deepest and most authentic fruit of religion itself. All religions, then, seek a “summit” of holiness, of experience, of inner transformation to which their believers – or an elite of believers – aspire because they hope, so to speak, to incarnate in their own lives the highest values in which they believe. To put it in grossly oversimplified language, all religions aspire to a “union with God” in some way or other, and in each case this union is described in terms which have very definite analogies with the contemplative and mystical experiences in the Christian, and particularly the Catholic, tradition...

Note: Merton's always approaches these things from his deeply personal, Catholic / Christian perspective.

Three parts:

1. General Observations – setting the stage
2. Perspectives on Zen – comparisons only make sense at the level of experience.
3. Gandhi – a living example of a Hindu whose faith and action was enriched by the Christian Gospel.

General Observations

Conjectures of a Guilty Bystander

Since I am a Catholic, I believe, of course, that my Church guarantees for me the highest spiritual freedom. I would not be a Catholic if I did not believe this.... It is in Christ and in His Spirit that true freedom is found, and the Church is His Body, living by His Spirit.

At the same time, this aspiration to spiritual, interior and personal freedom is not foreign to other branches of Christianity and to the other great religions of the world. It is the one thing that all the higher religions have in common (though doubtless on different levels), and it would be no advantage to a Catholic to try to deny this: for what brings out the dignity and grandeur of all religion is by that very fact a point in favor for Catholicism also.

It is true that in the Catholic Church we believe that we have truly received the Spirit of God, the Spirit of Sonship which makes us free with the freedom of the sons of God. It is true that Protestants make this claim no less firmly, and perhaps indeed it is characteristic of them to make it with great emphasis... How do I know what grace God can and does give to the sincere evangelical Christian who obeys the light of his conscience and follows Christ according to the faith and love he has received? (pp 84 – 85)

If I do not have unity in myself, how can I even think, let alone, speak of unity among Christians? Yet, of course, in seeing unity for all Christians, I also attain unity within myself. The heresy of individualism: thinking oneself a completely self-sufficient unit and asserting this imaginary “unity” against all others. The affirmation of the self as simply “not the other.” But when I seek to affirm your unity by denying that you have anything to do with anyone else, by negating everyone else in the universe until you come down to you: what is that left to affirm? ... The true way is the opposite: 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 Buddhist, 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” when one really can. If I affirm myself as a Catholic merely by denying all that is Muslim, Jewish, Protestant, Hindu, Buddhist, etc., in the end I will find that there is not much left for me to affirm as a Catholic: and certainly no breath of the Spirit with which to affirm it. (pp 140 – 141)

Asian Journal, October 23, 1968 talk at Calcutta Interreligious conference - pg 306

Faith is not the suppression of doubt. It is the overcoming of doubt, and you overcome doubt by going through it. The man of faith who has never experienced doubt is not a man of faith. Consequently, the monk is one who has to struggle in the depth of his being with the presence of doubt, and to go through what some religions call the Great Doubt, to break through beyond doubt into a certitude which is very, very deep because it is not his own personal certitude, it is the certitude of God Himself, in us. The only ultimate reality is God. God lives and dwells in us. We are not justified by any action of our own, but we are called by the voice of God...to pierce through the irrelevance of our own life, while accepting that our life is totally irrelevant in order to find relevance in Him. And this relevance in Him is something that can only be

received, not something we grasp or possess. It is something that can only be received as a gift. Consequently, the kind of life that I represent is a life that is openness to gift; a gift from God and a gift from others. It is not that we go out into the world with a capacity to love others greatly. This too we know in ourselves, that our capacity for love is limited. And it has to be completed with the capacity to be loved, to accept love from others, to want to be loved by others, to admit our loneliness and to live with our loneliness because everybody is lonely. This is then another basis for the kind of experience I am talking about, which is a new approach, a different approach to the external experience of the monk. The monk in this solitude and in his meditation seeks this dimension of life. .. **And 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.**

Faith and Violence Apologies to an Unbeliever (1968) (pp 205 – 214):

My own peculiar task in my Church and in my world has been that of the solitary explorer who, instead of jumping on all the latest bandwagons at once, is bound to search the existential depths of faith in its silences, its ambiguities, and in those certainties which lie deeper than the bottom of anxiety. In these depths there are no easy answers, no pat solutions to anything. It is a kind of submarine life in which faith sometimes mysteriously takes on the aspect of doubt when, in fact, one has to doubt and reject conventional and superstitious surrogates that have taken the place of faith. On this level, the division between Believer and Unbeliever ceases to be so crystal clear. It is not that some are all right and others are all wrong: all are bound to seek in honest perplexity. Everybody is an Unbeliever more or less! Only when this fact is fully experienced, accepted and lived with, does one become fit to hear the simple message of the Gospel – or of any other religious teaching. The religious problem of the twentieth century is not understandable if we regard it only as a problem of Unbelievers and of atheists. It is also and perhaps chiefly a problem of Believers. The faith that has grown cold is not only the faith that the Unbeliever has lost but the faith that the Believer has kept. This faith has too often become rigid, or complex, sentimental, foolish, or impertinent. It has lost itself in imaginings and unrealities, dispersed itself in pontifical and organizational routines, or evaporated in activism and loose talk. The most hopeful sign of religious renewal is that authentic sincerity and openness with which some Believers are beginning to recognize this. At the very moment when it would seem that they had to gather for a fanatical last-ditch stand, these Believers are dropping their defensiveness, their defiance and their mistrust. They are realizing that a faith that is afraid of other people is not faith at all. A faith that supports itself by condemning others is itself condemned by the Gospel.

Asian Journal, November Circular Letter to Friends – November 9, 1968 pg 324

In summary, I can say so far my contacts with Asian monks have been very fruitful and rewarding. We seem to understand one another very well indeed.... They are all specialists in meditation and contemplation. This is what appeals to me most. It is invaluable to have direct contact with people who have really put in a lifetime of hard work in training their minds and liberating themselves from passion and illusion... they are men of unusual quality and depth, very warm and wonderful people. Talking with them is a real pleasure... I hope you will pray for me and for all those I will be meeting. I am sure the blessing of God will be upon these meetings, and I hope I can bring back to my monastery something of the Asian wisdom with which I am

fortunate to be in contact – but it is something very hard to put into words. 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. I hope and believe He may be present in the hearts of all of us. With my very best regards always, cordially yours in the Lord Jesus and in His Spirit.

Perspectives on Zen

Thomas Merton wrote to the famous Zen scholar and author, D.T. Suzuki, dated March 12, 1959:

I will not be so foolish as to pretend to you that I understand Zen... All I know is that when I read your books -- and I have read many of them ... I feel a profound and intimate agreement. Time after time, as I read your pages, something in me says, "That's it!" Don't ask me what ... I have my own way to walk, and for some reason or other Zen is right in the middle of it wherever I go. So there it is, with all it's beautiful purposelessness and it has become very familiar to me though I do not know "what it is." Or even if it is an "it". Not to be foolish and multiply words, I'll say simply that it seems to me that Zen is the very atmosphere of the Gospels, and the Gospels are busting with it. It is the proper climate for any monk, no matter what kind of monk he may be. If I could not breathe Zen I would probably die of spiritual asphyxiation. But still I don't know that it is. No matter. I don't know that the air is either.

Zen and the Birds of Appetite (1968) – More and more he spoke of Contemplation in terms of experience rather than in precise doctrinal statement. **The emphasis on experience beyond concepts and words led him back to Eastern thought and especially to Zen. It was a way of life closer to his own Christian tradition that he had initially thought.** It was, moreover, a means of enriching his understanding of that tradition.

The New Consciousness – pg 15

Christian renewal has meant that Christians are now wide open to Asian religions, ready, in the words of Vatican II, to “acknowledge, preserve and promote the spiritual and moral goods” found among them. It is not that simple... let us remind ourselves that another (not-Cartesian), metaphysical consciousness is still available to modern man. It starts not from the thinking and self-aware subject but from Being, ontologically seen to be beyond and prior to the subject-object division. Underlying the subjective experience of the individual self there is an immediate experience of Being. This is totally different from an experience of self-consciousness. It is completely nonobjective. It has in it none of the split and alienation that occurs when the subject become aware of itself as a quasi-object. This consciousness of Being... is an immediate experience that goes beyond reflexive awareness. It is not “consciousness of” but pure consciousness, in which the subject as such “disappears.” ... The Oriental religions and Christian mysticism have stressed, this self-aware subject is not final or absolute; it is a provisional self-construction which exists, for practical purposes, only in a sphere of relativity. Its existence has meaning in so far as it does not become fixated or centered upon itself as ultimate, learns to function not as its own center but “from God” and “for others.” The Christian term “from God” implies what the nontheistic religious philosophies conceive as the hypothetical Single Center of all beings, what T.S. Eliot called “the still point of the turning world,; but which Buddhism for example visualized not as “point” but as “void.” (and of course, the void is not visualized at all.) In brief, the form of consciousness assumes a totally different kind of self-awareness from that of the Cartesian thinking self which is its own justification and its own center. Here the individual is aware of himself as a self to-be-dissolved in self-giving, in love, in “letting-go,” in ecstasy, in God – there are many ways of phrasing it. The self is not its own center and does not orbit around itself; it is centered on

God, the one center of all, which is “everywhere and nowhere” in whom all are encountered, for whom all proceed. Thus from the very start this consciousness is disposed to encounter “the other” with whom it is already united anyway “in God.”

pp 6-7:

What is meant here is that the Zen consciousness does not distinguish and categorize what it sees in terms of social and cultural standards. It does not try to fit things into artificially preconceived structures. It does not judge beauty and ugliness according to canons of taste... If it seems to judge and distinguish, it does so only enough to point beyond judgement to the pure void. It does not settle its judgements as final. It does not erect its judgement into a structure to be defended against all comers. Here we can fruitfully reflect on the deep meaning of Jesus’ saying: “Judge not, and you will not be judged.” Beyond its moral implications, familiar to all, there is a Zen dimension to this word of the Gospel. Only when this Zen dimension is grasped will the moral bearing of it be fully clear! ... there eventually comes a time when like Moses we see that the thornbush of cultural and religious forms is suddenly on fire and we are summoned to approach it without shoes – and probably also without feet. Is the fire other than the Bush? More than the Bush? Or is it more the Bush than the Bush itself? The Burning Bush of Exodus reminds us strangely of the Prajnaparamita Sutra” “Form is emptiness, emptiness itself is form; form does not differ from emptiness (the Void), emptiness does not differ from form; whatever is form, that is emptiness, whatever is emptiness, that is form... “So too the words from the flame-and-bush in Exodus: “I am what I am.” These words go beyond position and negation, in fact no one quite knows what the Hebrew means.

Pg 8

The “mind of Christ” as described by St. Paul in Philippians 2 may be theologically worlds apart for the “mind of Buddha” – this I am not prepared to discuss. But the utter “self-emptying” of Christ – and the self-emptying which makes the disciple one with Christ in His kenosis – can be understood and has been understood in a very Zen-like sense as far as psychology and experience are concerned. Thus with all due deference to the vast doctrinal differences between Buddhism and Christianity, and preserving intact all respect for the claims of the different religions: in no way mixing up the Christian “vision of God” with the Buddhist “enlightenment,” we can nevertheless say that the two have this psychic “limitlessness” in common. And they tend to describe it in much the same language. It is not “emptiness,” now “dark night,” now “perfect freedom,” now “no-mind” now “poverty.”

pp 39 – 44

It cannot be repeated too often: in understanding Buddhism it would be a great mistake to concentrate on the “doctrine,” the formulated philosophy of life, and to neglect the experience which is absolutely essential, the very heart of Buddhism. This is, in a sense the exact opposite of the situation in Christianity. For Christianity begins with revelation. Though it would be misleading to classify this revelation simply as a “doctrine” and an “explanation” (it is far more than that – the revelation of God Himself in the mystery of Christ) it is nevertheless communicated to us in words, in statements, and everything depends on the believer’s accepting the truth of these statements. Therefore Christianity has always been profoundly concerned with these statements... At times this concern has been exaggerated almost to the point of an obsessions... This obsession with doctrinal formulas, juridical order and ritual exactitude has often made people forget that the heart of Catholicism, too, is a living experience of unity in Christ which far transcends

all conceptual formulations. What too often has been overlooked, in consequence, is that Catholicism is the taste and experience of eternal life... Too often the Catholic has imagined himself obliged to stop short at a mere correct and external belief expressed in good moral behavior, instead of entering fully into the life of hope and love consummated by union with the invisible God "in Christ and in the Spirit," thus fully sharing in the Divine Nature. (Ephesians 2:18, 2 Peter 1:4, Col. 1: 9-17, I John 4:12-12)... **When we set Christianity and Buddhism side by side, we must try to find the points where a genuinely common ground between the two exists. At the present moment, this is not easy task. In fact it still is practically impossible... except in a very schematic and artificial way. After all, what do we mean by Christianity, and what does we mean by Buddhism?** Is Christianity Christian Theology? Ethics? Mysticism? Worship? Is our idea of Christianity to be taken without further qualification as the Roman Catholic Church? The Protestantism of Luther or that of Bonhoeffer? ... The Catholicism of St. Thomas? Of St. Augustine and the Western Church Fathers? As supposedly "pure" Christianity of the Gospels?... And what do we mean by Buddhism? The Theravada Buddhism of Ceylon, of that of Burma? Speculative and scholastic Indian Buddhism of the middle ages? Of Zen? **The immense variety of forms taken by thought, experience, worship, moral practice, in both Buddhism and Christianity make all comparisons haphazard, and in the end, when someone like the late Dr. Suzuki announced a study on Mysticism: Christian and Buddhist, it turned out to be, rather practically in fact, a comparison between Meister Eckhart and Zen. To narrow the field in this way is at least relevant, though to take Meister Eckhart as representative of Christian Mysticism is hazardous.... (but) He was not comparing the mystical theology of Eckhart with the Buddhist philosophy of Zen Masters, but the experience of Eckhart, ontologically and psychologically, with the experience of the Zen Masters. This is a reasonable enterprise, offering some small hope of interesting and valid results... If a Christian mystic has an experience which can be phenomenologically compared with a Zen experience, does it matter that the Christian in fact believes he is personally united with God and the Zen-man interprets his experience as ... the Void being aware of itself? ... it is never easy to say with any security that what a Christian mystic and a Sufi and a Zen Master experience is really "the same thing." What does such a claim really mean? Can it be made at all, without implying (quite falsely) that these higher experiences are "experiences of something"? ... We have hardly reached the point where we know enough about these different states of consciousness and about their metaphysical implications to compare them in accurate detail. But there are nevertheless certain analogies and correspondence which are evident even now, and which may perhaps point out the way to a better mutual understanding. Let us not rashly take them as "proofs" but only as significant clues.**

pp 54 - 58

Zen explains nothing. It just sees. Sees what? Not an Absolute Object but Absolute Seeing. Though this may seem very remote from Christianity, which is definitely a message, we must nevertheless remember the importance of direct experience in the Bible. All forms of "knowing," especially in the religious sphere, and especially where God is concerned, are valid in proportion as they are a matter of experience and of intimate contact. We are all familiar with the Biblical expression "to know" in the sense of to possess in the act of love... We must never forget that Christianity is much more that the intellectual acceptance of a religious message by a blind and submissive faith which never understands what the message means except in terms of authoritative interpretations handed down externally by experts in the name of the Church. On the contrary, faith is the door to the full inner life of the Church, a life which includes not only access to an authoritative teaching but above all to a deep personal experience which is at once unique and yet shared by the whole Body of Christ, in the Spirit of Christ... Just as no one can know my inner self except my own

“spirit,” so no one can know God except God’s Spirit: yet this Holy Spirit is given to us, in such a way that God knows Himself in us, and this experience is utterly real, though it cannot be communicated in terms understandable to those who do not share it. Consequently, St Paul concludes, “we have the mind of Christ.” Now when we see that for Buddhism Prajna is describable as “having the Buddha mind” we understand that there must surely be some possibility of finding an analogy somewhere between Buddhist and Christian experience, though we are now speaking more in terms of doctrine than of pure experience. Yet the doctrine is about the experience. We cannot push our investigation further here, but it is significant that Suzuki, reading the following lines from Eckhart... said they were “the same as Prajna intuition”... Suzuki also frequently quotes a sentence of Eckhart’s “The eye wherein I see God is the same eye wherein God sees me” as the exact expression of what Zen means by Prajna.... What is important for us here is that the interpretation is highly suggesting and interesting in itself, reflecting a kind of intuitive affinity for Christian mysticism... Obviously, we have done little more than express a pious hope that a common ground can someday be found.

Gandhi – Living a public life of Deep Faith

Seeds of Destruction - Defends Gandhi at Oakham Boarding School in 1930 (age 15) pp 222 – 223:

Yet I remember arguing about Gandhi in my school dormitory: chiefly against the football captain, then the head prefect... I insisted Gandhi was right, that India was, with perfect justice, demanding that the British withdraw peacefully and go home; that the millions of people who lived in India had a perfect right to run their country. Such sentiments were of course beyond comprehension. How could Gandhi be right when he was so odd? And how could I be right if I was on the side of someone who had the wrong kind of skin, and left altogether too much of it exposed? A counter argument was offered but it was not an argument. It was a basic and sweeping assumption that the people of India were political and moral infants, incapable of taking care of themselves, backward people, primitive, uncivilized, benighted, pagan, who could not survive without the English to do their thinking and planning for them. The British Raj was, in fact, a purely benevolent, civilizing enterprise for which the Indians were not suitably grateful... **Infuriated at the complacent idiocy of this argument, I tried to sleep but failed.**

Conjectures of a Guilty Bystander: pg 113 - 114

“The business of every God-fearing man,” says Gandhi, “is to dissociate himself from evil in *total disregard of the consequences*. He must have faith in a good deed producing only a good result... He follows the truth though the following of it may endanger his very life. He knows that it is better to die in the way of God than to live in the way of Satan.” – *My Non-violence*

This is precisely the attitude that we have lost in the West, because we have lost our fundamentally religious view of reality, of being and of truth. And that is what Gandhi retained...Gandhi’s standard is the standard of the New Testament: to do all thing in the name of Christ, in the name of the truth, that is to say for the sake of the truth in them which is a manifestation of Christ. To act out of love for truth, “doing the truth in charity” is to act for truth alone, and without regard for consequences. Not that one recklessly does what seems to be good without care for possible disaster, but that one carefully chooses what one believes to be good and then leaves the good itself to product its own good consequences in its own good time.

(Gandhi) neither accepted Christianity nor rejected it; he took all he found in Christian thought that seemed relevant to him as a Hindu. The rest was, at least for the time being, of merely external interest. Here was no syncretism and no indifferentism. Gandhi had the deepest respect for Christianity, for Christ and the Gospel. In following the way of satyagraha (holding the truth, resistance by non-violent means) he believed he was following the Law of Christ, and it would be difficult to prove that this belief was entirely mistaken – or that it was in any degree insincere. One of the great lessons of Gandhi’s life remains this: through the spiritual traditions of the West he, an Indian, discovered his Indian heritage and with it his own “right mind.” And in his fidelity to his own heritage and its spiritual sanity, he was able to show men of the West and of the whole world a way to recover their own “right mind” in their own tradition, thus manifesting the fact that there are certain indisputable and essential values – religious, ethical, ascetic, spiritual and philosophical – which man has everywhere needed and which he has in the past managed to acquire, values without which he cannot live, values which are now in large measure lost to him so that, unequipped to face life in a fully human manner, he now runs the risk of destroying himself entirely. Call these values what you will, “natural religion” or “natural law,” Christianity admits their existence at least as preambles to faith and grace, if not sometimes vastly more... These values are universal, and it is hard to see how there can be any “catholic-ity” that even implicitly excludes them. One of the marks of catholicity is precisely that values which are everywhere natural to man are fulfilled on the highest level in the Law of the Spirit. And in Christian charity. A “charity” that excludes these values cannot claim the title of Christian love.

Hence for Gandhi to speak, write, fast and exercise nonviolent resistance... was... to bear witness to the chief truth of Hinduism: “The belief that ALL life (not only human beings but all sentient beings) is one, i.e., all life coming from the One universal source, call it Allah, God or Parameshwara” Gandhi adds an interesting commentary on this. His immediate conclusion is one that is full of social and moral consequences: “Hinduism excludes all exploitation”...

It is certainly true that Gandhi was not above all criticism; no man is. But it is evident that he was unlike all other world leaders of his time in that his life was marked by a wholeness and a wisdom, an integrity and a spiritual consistency that the other lacked, or manifested only in reverse, in consistent fidelity to a dynamism of evil and destruction... His way was no secret: it was simply to follow conscience without regard for the consequences to himself, in the belief that this was demanded of him by God. Perhaps indeed for a long time these results would remain hidden as God’s secret. But in the end the truth would manifest itself. What has Gandhi to do with Christianity? Everyone knows that the Orient has venerated Christ and distrusted Christians since the first colonizers and missionaries came from the West... Gandhi certainly spoke often of Jesus, whom he had learned to know through Tolstoy. And Gandhi knew the New Testament thoroughly. Whether or not Gandhi “believed in” Jesus in the sense that he had genuine Christian faith in the Gospel would be very difficult to demonstrate, and it is not my business to prove it or disprove it. I think the effort to do so would be irrelevant in any case. What is certainly true is that Gandhi not only understood the ethic of the Gospel as well, if not in some ways better than many Christians, but he is one of the very few men of our time who applied Gospel principles to the problems of a political and social existence in such a way that his approach to these problems was inseparably religious and political at the same time...

For Gandhi, strange as it may seem to us, political action had to be by its very nature “religious” in the sense that it had to be informed by principles of religious and philosophical wisdom. To separate religion and politics was in Gandhi’s eyes “madness” because his politics rested on a thoroughly religious interpretation of reality, of life, and of man’s place in the world. Gandhi’s whole concept of man’s relations to his own inner being and to the world of objects around him was informed by the contemplative heritage of Hinduism, together with the principles of Karma Yoga which blended in his thought, with the ethic of the Synoptic Gospels and the Sermon on the Mount. In such a view, politics had to be understood in the context of service and worship in the ancient sense of ... (liturgy, public work). Man’s intervention in the active life of society was at the same time by its very nature... his own personal service (of God and man) and worship... Political action was ... a means of witnessing to the truth and the reality of the cosmic structure by making one’s own proper contribution to the order willed by God. One could thus preserve one’s integrity and peace, being detached from results (which were in the hands of God) and being free from the inner violence that comes from division and untruth...Gandhi emphasized the importance of the individual person entering political action with a fully awakened and operative spiritual power in himself, the power of Satyagraha, non-violent dedication to truth, a religious and spiritual force, a wisdom born of fasting and prayer. This is the charismatic and personal force of the saints... Gandhi remains in our time as a sign of the genuine union of spiritual fervor and social action... Gandhi’s religio-political action was based on an ancient metaphysics of man, a philosophical wisdom which is common to Hinduism, Buddhism, Islam, Judaism, and Christianity: that “truth is the inner law of our being.” ... Gandhi’s religious action is based on a religious intuition of being in man and in the world, and his vow of truth is a vow of fidelity to being in all its accessible dimensions. His wisdom is based on experience more than on logic. Hence the way of peace is the way of truth, of fidelity to wholeness and being, which implies a basic respect for life not as a concept, not as a sentimental figment of the imagination, but in its deepest most secret and most fontal reality. The first and fundamental truth is to be sought in respect for our own inmost being, and this in turn implies the recollectedness and the awareness which attune us to that silence in which alone Being speaks to us in all its simplicity... Therefore he fasted, observed days of silence, lived frequently in retreat, knew the value of solitude, as well as the totally generous expenditure of his time and energy in listening to others and communicating with them... “Jesus died in vain,” said Gandhi, “if he did not teach us to regulate the whole of life by the eternal law of love.”... Gandhi believed that the central problem of our time was the acceptance or the rejection of a basic law of love and truth which had been made known to the world in traditional religions and most clearly by Jesus Christ. Gandhi himself expressly and very clearly declared himself an adherent of this one law. His whole life, his political action, finally even his death, were nothing but a witness to his commitment. “IF LOVE IS NOT THE LAW OF OUR BEING THE WHOLE OF MY ARGUMENT FALLS TO PIECES.”... It is true that Gandhi expressly disassociated himself from Christianity in any of its visible and institutional forms. But it is also true he built his whole life and all his activity upon what he conceived to be the law of Christ. In fact, he died for this law which was at the heart of his belief... A Christian can do nothing greater than follow his own conscience with a fidelity comparable to that which Gandhi obeyed what he believed to be the voice of God.

Closing Prayer

Preface: This new language of prayer has to come out of something which transcends all our traditions, and comes out of the immediacy of love. We have to part now, aware of the love that unites us, the love that unites us in spite of real differences, real emotional friction... The things on the surface are nothing, what is deep is the Real. We are creatures of Love. Let us therefore join hands, as we did before, and I will try to say something that comes out of the depths of our hearts. I ask you to concentrate on the love that is in you, that is in us all. I have no idea what I am going to say. I am going to be silent a minute, and then I will say something...

“O God, we are one with You. You have made us one with You. You have taught us that if we are open to one another, You dwell in us. Help us to preserve this openness and to fight for it with all our hearts. Help us to realize that there can be no understanding where there is mutual rejection. O God, in accepting one another wholeheartedly, fully, completely, we accept You, and we thank You, and we adore You, and we love You with our whole being, because our being is Your being, our spirit is rooted in Your spirit. Fill us then with love, and let us be bound together with love as we go our diverse ways, united in this one spirit which makes You present in the world, and which makes You witness to the ultimate reality that is love. Love has overcome. Love is victorious. Amen.” – **Closing statements and prayer from an informal address delivered in Calcutta, India (October 1968)**