Theology of Supervision: The Power of Encounter

When I think about what I believe about God, humanity, how humans relate to God, and how my theological beliefs influence my work as an educator and a member of the ACPE community of ministry and learning, I draw on my experience of learning English as a second language. Learning another language is different from learning any other subject, because it takes the learner beyond mastery and memorization into the dangerous territory of being changed by what is being learned. Learning to speak differently demands seeing differently. Learning to see differently depends on the vulnerability of connection to a different culture and a different part of the greater human whole. To truly understand a foreign language takes willingness to stand under the alternative frame of reference and experience of the Other—and risk the transformative power of that encounter.

My theology bears witness to the transformative power of encounters with the Other. I was born in the USSR, a place with a profound Russian Orthodox heritage that was cut off from its religious roots during Soviet rule. Thus, my faith began in a cradle of paradox. At the intersection of atheistic humanism and subversive proclamation of the gospel by Russian literature and art, I knew God only intuitively and mutely, as the author of beauty and truth in human life. In my twenties, an encounter with United Methodists introduced me to a personal God, God who knew me deeply and loved me unconditionally. My faith in this God, as inescapable as trustworthy, led me to risk a radical departure from my country, people, and life as I knew it. In America, my faith deepened through my studies but also in an encounter with another community of faith: the Order of Cistercians of the Strict Observance. As unlikely an encounter as this—a Russian Korean Protestant clergywoman in a monastery of American Roman Catholic cloistered monks—it was truly life-giving. Under Trappist guidance, I matured spiritually as my academic knowledge of God came to life in the actuality of religious experience, my love of communal worship was deepened by solitude, and the busyness of my ministerial action found at last a firmer footing in the stillness of contemplation.

Then the Unthinkable happened. What started as a case of burnout gradually turned into an acute autoimmune crisis, threatening to take away my ability to finish my dissertation, our family savings, and, for several frightening months when I was extremely sick, my life. As I descended into the valley of intimate confrontation with my own mortality, I waited, asked, and then begged for divine comfort and rescue or some shred of reassurance that God was with me on this journey. I got none. In that struggle, I could not bear, nor be sustained by, the shiny promises of God's providential care. Instead, a different kind of spirituality—not of light and blessed assurance but of darkness and dread—schooled my heart as I came to know God anew in the formidable and infuriating experience of God's absence.

In that painful season, I uncovered another strand of my spiritual heritage, Buddhism. For five long years, the nontheistic spiritual practice of Zen was my link to sanity and survival and a space where my theological reflection slowly began anew. Zen trained me in the art of not running away as I wrestled with the dark angel of my shattered faith. And when daybreak came, I saw that the sheer force of that encounter left me permanently limping, but also blessed. My blessing is a spiritual knowledge of light and darkness, a theology in which God's presence is forever bound

to God's absence, and an experience of salvation coming not in the form of miraculous deliverance but as a mystery of resurrection in the aftermath of a real death.

When students come to CPE, they too find themselves face to face with the Unthinkable. Acute clinical crises and the disorientation of the educational method take their learning into the realm of the mind-baffling, the overwhelmingly difficult, and the absurd. Like me, most are unprepared for the assault to their faith posed by suffering. Drawing on my experience as a patient and a chaplain, I see my work as an educator as helping my students reach the full range of their pastoral identity and functioning, by empowering them to develop a holistic theology of ministry and become capable of caring for others not only in the sunlit expanses of God's presence but also in the darker shadowlands of God's absence.

For my primary theology, I draw on the life and work of Thomas Merton.[1] Merton bears witness to the positive (kataphatic) and negative (apophatic) dimensions of Christian faith, revealing how our knowledge of light and darkness in God and ourselves can deepen our commitment to the healing and transformation of the world. I use the Zen practice of sitting meditation (*zazen*) as my critical purchase.[2] The silent, embodied way of knowing self and God made possible by *zazen* is a vital companion to the work of conscious theological understanding of humanity and divinity, modeled by Merton's writings. By positioning my students' learning at the intersection of written theology and spiritual practice, I help them ground their rational theological reflection in the experiential actuality of their pastoral encounters and, in so doing, discover—beneath the shroud of Divine Silence—the hidden ground of Transcendent Love.

VOCABULARY OF FAITH: A TRINITARIAN THEOLOGY OF PRESENCE

At the heart of Merton's theology is the belief that echoes St. Augustine's *Confessions*: "You have made us for yourself, O Lord, and our hearts are restless until they rest in You."[3] Human beings have an innate capacity and deep need for communion with the Divine. Drawing on his own journey, Merton asserts that the search for the Transcendent is not limited to monks but open to all people. It is a universal attribute of humankind. God is our homeland; in life and in death, we belong to God. And the movement of divine life itself is behind every act of love and care we bring into the world. The purpose of human life is to discover this truth and learn to live according to it.[4]

Merton's stark declaration of God as the fundamental source and telos of human existence is at the heart of my supervisory practice. Remembering that it is God who animates and gives meaning to ministry, I see my students' faith as the foundation of their pastoral formation and functioning. Using my own story as a template, I regard faith as a human universal, not always religious in its content. Faith is connected to the fundamental values and beliefs we hold; it is the center of power and devotion that sustains our lives and guides our action. As an educator, I listen for the sense of the ultimate in my students' lives: What do they see as valuable? What gives their lives unity and meaning? What are their images of authority? And what inner mandate made them brave the hospital in the midst of a pandemic? Throughout the unit, I ask them to make conscious connections between what they confess with their mouths and what they do in their ministry. I invite formal reflection on the central themes and core values of their religious heritage and spiritual frameworks of meaning that inform their clinical work. The goal of my supervisory practice is to help my students understand their faith in a critically informed way and use it to deepen their pastoral competency.

At the same time, I expect that my students' faith will be challenged and at times changed in their encounter with the faith of others: peers, educators, and people in their care. I believe that something genuinely theological (not just psychological) is to be learned in pastoral ministry, when we attend to the dialogue between sacred texts and the "living human documents" in the clinic. My greatest hope is that my students will discover that human experience itself is a source of divine self-revelation, meeting each person in their care with the humble awareness of encountering God anew. For Merton, an intimate connection exists between our knowledge of God, self, and the Other. My educational practice moves along these three axes of supervisory assessment and intervention. I bear witness and participate in the dynamics of human-divine relationality as I support my students' ministerial growth and spiritual becoming.

PERIKHŌRĒSIS and KÉNŌSIS: The Divine Dance of Creativity and Self-Emptying Love

Merton is most poetic when he speaks of God and the divine intention to bring the world into being. God is a gardener, an artist, a dancer, and the world is intended to be a place of beauty and gladness. Importantly, his imagery is linked not to the adult-like, masculine perfection but to the delicate innocence of a girl at play. God is like "the feminine child playing in the world, obvious and unseen . . . [whose] delights are to be with the children of men. She is their sister. The core of

life that exists in all things is tenderness, mercy, virginity, the Light, the Life considered as passive, as received, as given, as taken, as inexhaustibly renewed."[5] Theologically, Merton bears witness to the eternal movement of God's love, manifested in the intimate indwelling of the Divine Being in the created beings in the world. It is embodied in the ongoing activity of creation, the continual mystery of incarnation, and above all, the redemptive transformation of suffering in the world. Divine *perikhōrēsis* and divine *kenosis* are two sides of God's loving engagement with the world, wherein the twin realities of divine presence and divine absence not only reach the realm of human experience but also penetrate deeply into the mystery of God's own life.

Following Merton's theological imagery, I see my supervisory practice unfolding at the intersection of creativity and sacrifice. I create pedagogically by developing a curriculum, schedule, and assignments and connecting them to the clinical method and ACPE objectives and outcomes. I create spatially by working with the physicality of the learning environment, the administrative context of the department and the hospital at large. Most importantly, I create relationally, seeking to foster the quality of interpersonal connection that will help us hold the intensity of crisis and loss in the climate of nurturance and joy of communal learning. CPE is a serious business, with its inherent disorientation, uncertainty, conflict, and even chaos; yet, I often see my students' greatest growth happening when I stop taking myself so deadly seriously, cast my solemnity to the winds, and join them in godly play. A gardener, an artist, and a dancer myself, I seek to draw my students into the human-divine perichoresis of learning and care.

My creativity and deliberately cultivated playfulness are balanced by my deep awareness of the kenotic dynamics of supervision. Knowing that no amount of preparation can ensure my students' growth, I empty myself to create room for the unique unfolding of their learning. As they go through inevitable growing pains, I resist the temptation to give answers or offer premature assurances. My focus instead is on being present, suffering with them through the ups and downs of their growth. My deliberately patient (Latin, *pati*, "suffering") mode of supervisory engagement is a way of teaching what I believe to be the essence of spiritual care. As the divine self-emptying presence in the world "saves" the world by a joined bearing of the unbearable, so does our human self-emptying presence to one another transform the suffering. This brings forth the possibility of healing, even when external circumstances cannot be altered. Ultimately, I seek to connect the divine kenosis of incarnation to my students' own journey of spiritual formation,

helping them to see even their theology as arising from the particularity of their culture and personal story.

My supervisory posture of creativity and self-emptying love was embodied in my work with CN, a White, United Methodist female student from an affluent background in her forties. CN had a caring heart but lacked awareness of the fundamental life challenges endured by many people in her care. Her image of pastoral care—Jesus sitting . . . with a flower . . . lovingly waiting for people to join him—revealed God as ever-present, kind, bringing all to a good end. Even faced with suffering, CN struggled with God's absence as a theological possibility. This affected her pastoral care as she was unable to enter the places of others' pain, hastening to lead them "out of darkness" in a time when a shared bearing of the unbearable would have been a more fitting pastoral response. I drew heavily on my theological value of kenotic love to practice forbearance of CN's privileged naïveté, engaging her from a place of compassionate curiosity about the link between her theology and her lived experience of comfort and providential care in the world.

My supervisory posture created a space for CN's peers to engage her in exploration of her inability to imagine God as absent. At mid-unit, CN was called to minister to a Black twenty-year-old man speaking of suicide, and she was overwhelmed by deep compassion and an equally deep realization of the tremendous gulf of experience between them. As her eager affirmation of God's care was met with the dispirited "Nobody's cared for a long time," CN began to feel a sense of hopelessness she had not felt in her own life before. In the weeks that followed, as she wrestled with this severe disruption to her theology, I suffered with her in her disorientation and distress, modeling the ministry of presence I hoped she herself would provide. CN's breakthrough came in the moment of hearing in this man's voice the echoes of her own teenage son's painful self-doubt and connecting both to Christ's anguished cry on the cross: "My God, my God, why have your forsaken me?!" CN discovered that being fully present to others in the frightening experience of God's absence did not destroy but deepened her theology. Grounded in my theological understanding of God's creative, self-emptying love, I accompanied CN through the painful "loss of innocence" necessary for the development of her pastoral competency.

IMAGO DEI: Human Beings in Relation to God

In 1958, at the corner of two busy streets in Louisville, Merton had a revelation:

> I suddenly realized that I loved all people and that none of them were or could be totally alien to me. As if waking from a dream, the dream of my separateness, I realized I am a member of the human race—and what more glorious destiny is there for a man, since the Word was made flesh and became, too a member of the Human Race! [I]f 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.[6]

Merton's life is a testimony to his understanding of the unique relationship that exists between Divinity and humanity. Human persons relate to God in the most intimate way, manifesting the Divine Being in the beautiful particularity of their created beings. God's image is the deepest reality of the human person, the "virgin point" (French, *le point vierge*) at the center of our soul, untouched by sin, sorrow, cruelty, or illusion. It is a place of the utmost existential poverty and, as such, the most transparent and powerful in revealing God in the world. Human beings in relation to God, therefore, are bearers of the paradoxical union between the ultimate commonality of their divine origin and the dazzling diversity of their human incarnations.[7]

Informed by Merton's paradoxical anthropology, I understand my work as an educator as tending to the interplay of similarity and difference in my students' learning. Mindful that at the heart of our human similarity is our relationship with God, I see each student as a precious, irreplaceable icon of Divine Presence in the world. From the initial interviews to the daily realities of our learning together, I meet my students with an attitude of reverence, curiosity, and unconditional positive regard. This educational posture is a foundation of our supervisory alliance and a powerful avenue for teaching spiritual care. As my students experience themselves seen and known as the cherished revelations of the Divine in our time of learning, they begin, I hope, to relate similarly to people in their care. At the same time, remembering that the infinite diversity of divine expression is at the heart of our human difference, I see each CPE student and cohort as a unique manifestation of human personhood and culture. Attentive to my students' personal stories, I proactively educate myself about their origin and social location. My cultural humility and intentional hospitality to difference, in turn, teaches them to practice these competencies in their relationship with others. The learning community we co-create is an embodied way of learning spiritual care. My appreciation of similarity and difference also informs my approach to theological reflection. Seeing human faith as both unique and universal, I invite my students to see theology itself as a coded language; even when we all speak English, what we mean by "God," "salvation," or "eternal life" contains vast individual and communal differences! By teaching them

to see their theological differences as a matter of distinct "linguistic inheritance," I challenge the rigidity of their right-*vs.*-wrong and us-*vs.*-them frames of reference, thus empowering them to explore each other's sacred languages of faith and the deeper meaning they hold.

My supervisory ability to use the interplay of similarity and difference in service of my students' learning was especially evident in my work with DB, a White, Southern Baptist, theologically and politically conservative pastor from rural North Carolina in his sixties. DB referred to God as "Father," spoke of "submission of wives to husbands," and voted for Trump; yet, he was also a humble man who cared deeply for people around him. DB's cohort consisted of a Black man of similar age and White liberal seminarians who reacted to DB's theology with impassioned outbreaks of criticism, in turn eliciting intense defensiveness from him. In this conflict, my ability to see DB as a precious image of God beyond the labels of "conservative," "fundamentalist," and "Trump supporter" and to see the group's interpersonal turbulence as a struggle with difference helped me reframe our work of learning not as a fight to change each other's theology but as a commitment to understand each other's language. As we focused our attention on exploring the meaning behind often-triggering words while unconditionally affirming our personal worth, DB began to notice not only the effect of his language on people around him but also the ways in which his theology limited his own ability to express the love he felt for God and people. This, in turn, created a powerful shift in his clinical ministry. If before he had alternated between preaching (when sensing theological similarity) and hiding (in the face of difference), now he worked to listen to the deeper meaning behind the words. My intervention also created a learning opportunity for DB's peers; with the dynamics of scapegoating undone, they were now free to explore their own theological differences. Using my theological understanding of the *imago Dei* to inform my supervisory work with similarity and difference in the group, I supported DB and his cohort in the development of self-awareness and interpersonal skills, resulting in noticeable improvements in their pastoral functioning.

THEŌSIS: Nurturing Connections to the Sacred, Building Communities of Care

Merton's poetic understanding of God and the intimate way humankind relates to God is not a spiritualized denial of the existence of pain, oppression, and violence in the world or their capacity to wound and diminish our ability to be in relationship with God and one another. Merton's life bears witness to his deep engagement with the major societal ills of his time and the ever-widening

circle of people from Christian, religious, and secular walks of life whose social activism was rooted not merely in sociological insight but spiritual commitment.[8] At the core of Merton's theology of social action is his lived experience of contemplation. He sees contemplation as the ultimate nature and goal of human becoming. Its true meaning is not a solipsistic withdrawal into the confines of the mind but an ever-deepening realization of our profound connectedness to God, fellow humans, and the whole creation. For Merton, our journey of sanctification (*theōsis*) centers less on the attainment of personal virtue and more on the development of a mature capacity for "relatedness." Our spiritual becoming as persons is ultimately and intimately linked to our shared becoming as a community of care, the deepening of our ability to be in communion with God and one another, as we work together towards healing and the transformation of suffering in the world.[9]

My theological belief in relationality as the fundamental dynamic of human becoming is where I see my day-to-day educational work with students intersect most powerfully with the overarching mission and values of ACPE. As an educator, I attend to all three axes of human relationality: the interplay of the human and the divine, the personal and the communal, and inner experience and social responsibility. I invite my students to be mindful of the layers of relationality that shape their pastoral formation and functioning. I ask them to pay attention to the physicality of ministry, noticing how their clinical encounters are affected by race, gender, age, and other facets of human embodied existence. I deepen their awareness of the powerful systems of exclusion, injustice, and oppression in our society and their role in the perpetuation of suffering. I initiate conversations about our own conscious and unconscious participation in these systems and the necessary work of unlearning the entrenched habits of our wounded relatedness. At the same time, I invite my students to see their own spiritual health as a foundation for sustainable ministry, tending to their personal connection to the Sacred, and building communities in which they themselves could receive care. My greatest hope is that they discover CPE itself as a paradoxical space of nurturance and challenge. When they realize that the work of learning to do ministry does something to them in the process, they begin to see that their own healing and transformation are linked, mysteriously and deeply, to the healing and transformation of the world.

This was true in my work with KCM, a White, Episcopalian, petite female student in her thirties. With a PhD in religion, strong interpersonal skills, passion for social justice, and personal history of loss, KCM brought many gifts for ministry. Yet, when the unit began, she struggled

with intense anxiety and self-doubt in clinical visitation. Her first verbatim was about a dementia patient, a large Black woman who became agitated and charged towards KCM, causing her to flee the room in panic; afterwards, a male nurse repeatedly checked on KCM to ensure she was okay. While KCM saw it as an "absolute disaster of a visit," her group presentation demonstrated deep levels of engagement, insight, vulnerability, and commitment to care even in the face of distress.

I was struck by a peculiar juxtaposition of competency and incompetency I observed in KCM; with so many gifts for ministry, she was cut off from her own power. Guided by my theological understanding of relationality as a foundation of pastoral formation, I invited KCM to become curious about the embodied, communal, and wider systemic dynamics of the visit, discerning tacit beliefs that framed her experience of "failure." Working with her peers, KCM became aware of the powerful familial and cultural assumptions ("not being good enough; female/male bodies and perception of ability; chaplain's inferiority among clinical staff; the trope of Black people as physically threatening to White women") that fueled her pervasive sense of incompetency. I supported KCM in critical examination of her old beliefs while challenging her to articulate theological themes emerging in her relational experience of the present. As she articulated her faith in the "Divine unfailing presence in the world, and people's inherent worth and ability as beloved children of God," KCM began to reclaim her own belovedness as a child of God and ability as a minister, showing a marked increase in pastoral authority, functioning, and voice. At the end of the unit, KCM suffered another unexpected loss, and I wondered about its effect on her educational and clinical experience. Yet, KCM's willingness to engage her grief in the context of saying goodbyes to her CPE peers, and her new ability to use her pain to come alongside others in their suffering, were a true testament to her growth. Grounded in my theological understanding of relationality, I supported the intricate mutuality of KCM's personal healing and pastoral transformation.

DIALOGUES WITH DIVINE SILENCE: ZEN AS CRITICAL PURCHASE

My primary theology has a profound influence on my supervisory practice. My experience of God's presence and God's absence, informed by the apophatic and kataphatic dimensions of Merton's mystical theology, provides rich imagery and conceptuality for my engagement with students. Yet, in-depth learning of spiritual care involves more than the rational knowing *about* God and humanity in the orderly realm of theological reflection. It calls for the intimate knowing

of God, as well as the light and shadow sides of human existence, in the messy actuality of firsthand experience. As such, CPE learning needs to reach not only the outer context of students' clinical and educational work but also the inner spaces of communion with God and the mystery of their own selves. As an educator, I see the interplay between the arduous labor of *doing* and the unhurried work of *being* with the Other as crucial for my students' pastoral formation.

Theoretically, I augment the language-, reason-, and doing-focused dynamics of my primary theology with the silent, extrarational, and being-centered character of Zen sitting meditation practice *(zazen)*. Zen influence on my educational practice is akin to a sharp, embodied reminder—"Don't just do something, sit there!"—insisting that I return, deliberately and repeatedly, to the deeper recesses of my being to inform the work of my supervisory doing.

The core difference between Zen and Christian theology lies in Zen's focus not on the doctrinal statements of faith but on the direct experience of life. Zen seeks to reach beyond words, beyond concepts, beyond analytical reasoning itself—into the intuitive "getting it"—in the immediacy of experiential awareness and insight. Buddhist monks simply observe: to live is to suffer. Suffering in Zen is not a theological problem to be solved but an existential reality to reckon with. I call this embodied discipline the *path of negation*. It grounds my commitment to systematic examination and deliberate surrender of the mental certainty created by words, thoughts, and assumptions in order to arrive at a fresh experience of oneself, the Other, and the world around one, freer from preconceptions. The daily practice of meditation is a powerful way to discover the difference between the smokescreen reality created by our minds and reality as it is, unfolding anew in the actuality of each moment.[10]

An important example of Zen influence on my supervision is my work with students in situations of spiritual crisis engendered by CPE. CPE brings on a crisis of faith because it involves raw, face-to-face confrontation with human suffering: the death of a four-year-old from leukemia, the sudden cardiac arrest of a fifty-two-year-old paragon of exercise and self-care, the mother of two young children who falls into a coma due COVID-19. This leaves many students shaken to their core, not just because the events themselves are heartbreaking but also because they create a frightening rupture in what they had known and believed before about human life, the world, and—in the context of explicit religious conviction—God. Being privy to immense and at times immensely gratuitous human suffering shatters their existing worldview, leaving them in a place of profound existential and educational vulnerability. Their old "theology" is no more, but their

new one has not yet been created, and they lack the support of a personal system of meaning necessary for living and learning.

In such a painfully disorienting season, students often over-focus on suffering as a theological problem, going into heady discussions of theodicy as a way to avoid the tremendous fright of witnessing the untimely death or excruciating pain of another human being. I believe theological reflection at such times is premature. Instead, trained by Zen's rigorous discipline of negation, I invite my students to let go, for the time being, the exhausting work of making sense and allow themselves to "just sit with it"—in the chapel after a difficult visit, in the garden at the end of the shift, at the nurses' station before going into the patients' rooms, in the car after IPR, in group and IS times intentionally left open for contemplative practice. This invitation is much more than a well-intended summons to self-care. It is an intentional act of creating a qualitatively different space of learning, one that is deliberately closed to dogmatic, discursive, and doing-centered ways of engagement. As such, it is a space where students are relieved of the pressure to come up with a neat theological answer and given permission to not-know, to not articulate, to not act but simply to *be as they are* in that moment, i.e., stunned and knocked nearly senseless by the sheer immensity of human pain. If they learn nothing else in my unit of CPE, they have learned enough; now they know the difference between the busy work of trying to explain the suffering away and the real work of cultivating interior stability in the face of it. By temporarily restraining their reflexive preoccupation with action and anxiety-driven theological reflection, I use the inevitable "wounding" of CPE in service of their pastoral growth, bringing them to a place of awareness, connection, and ability to co-create the healing space of being with the wounded Others—including the yet-unknown Silent God who lives, dies, and suffers with us every step of the journey.

CONCLUSION

As an educator and spiritual care clinician, I stand at the crossroads of East and West spiritual heritages and worldviews. My supervisory practice embodies the duality of my spiritual identity in my intentional engagement with the mystical theology of Thomas Merton and Zen meditation practice. My primary theological beliefs, in humanity as the image of God and in God as a creative, self-emptying love calling us to the fullness of our true selfhood, inform my understanding of sacred relationality as the core theological commitment that animates my work as an educator. My

critical purchase helps me understand CPE itself as a spiritual practice of "sitting with" the light and dark currents of human becoming and as a powerful way of teaching the ministry of presence as a primary means of spiritual care. As I move between the two worlds of my theological belonging, journeying alongside my students even as they themselves are journeying alongside people in their care, I enter pastoral supervision as a holy place of encounter. Our deepening capacity for communion with God and one another is the foundation for all learning, healing, and transformation.

The image featured on the title page of my Theology paper is my reproduction of Yushi Nomura's brushwork illustrating a saying from the desert fathers (Yushi Nomura and Henri J. M. Nouwen, Desert Wisdom: Sayings from the Desert Fathers [Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2007], 1). Watercolor on Arches 140-lb. cold-pressed paper, 8'' x 12.''

NOTES

[1] Thomas Merton, OCSO, was ordained as Father Louis at Gethsemani Abbey in 1949, and he lived there until his accidental death in Bangkok in 1968. My connection to Fr. Louis goes much deeper than the conceptuality of his theology. As a Lay Cistercian oblate of Gethsemani Abbey, I share with him not only the intricate complexity of theological reasoning but also the core charisms characterizing the monastic way of life. As such, Thomas Merton is not merely my "primary theologian"; he is my brother. To say that Thomas Merton is my primary theologian, however, is to lay claim to the radical diversity of my theology. In his writings, Merton drew not only on the entire theological canon of Benedictine-Cistercian monasticism but also on the Western and Eastern fathers and mothers of the church, the Reformation, Russian atheism, and various spiritual traditions of the East (reading many of the sources in their original languages). This theological richness is another point of my deep connection to Merton; I too stand at the crossroads of the contemporary and the ancient, Russian Orthodox, Roman Catholic, and United Methodist, religious and secular, the East and the West—I am a theological mongrel, bewildered and enriched by the messy particularity of my identity.

[2] My first introduction to *zazen* happened through my practice of martial arts and *sumi-e* painting: sitting meditation was a way to train the mind as a foundation for enhanced physical and artistic expression. My understanding deepened as a result of studying Tibetan Buddhist meditation practices at Emory University, especially in my engagement with the Center for Contemplative Science and Compassion-Based Ethics and the Compassion-Centered Spiritual Health program. I bear a special debt of gratitude to my teachers, ACPE Certified Educator Rev. Maureen Shelton and Drs. Timothy Harrison and Brendan Ozawa-de Silva, for inspiring and supporting my commitment to nurturing the link between my supervisory formation and my spiritual practice.

[3] St. Augustine's Confessions (Lib 1,1–2, 2.5: CSEL 33, 1–5).

[4] Thomas Merton, *No Man Is an Island* (New York: Dell Publishing, 1957), 19.

[5] This passage comes from "Hagia Sophia," a prose poem on divine Wisdom as the Feminine manifestation of God. Thomas Merton, *The Collected Poems of Thomas Merton* (New York: New Directions, 1998), 368. Here and in many of his writings about the Divine Feminine he drew on Proverbs 8. See, for example, Thomas Merton, *New Seeds of Contemplation* (New York: New Directions, 1991), 290–97.

[6] Merton wrote about this experience in two places: Thomas Merton, *Conjectures of a Guilty Bystander* (New York: Image Books, 2014), 142–58; Thomas Merton, *A Search for Solitude: Pursuing the Monk's True Life* (New York: Harper Collins, 2014), 181–82. I took the liberty of combining the quotations because they bear witness to the ongoing significance and evolution of his theological understanding.

[7] Such incarnational understanding of human diversity was not a poetic flourish for Merton but a deep theological commitment. For example, in his essay "The Jesuits in China," Merton reflects on the work of Jesuit missionary Matteo Ricci, whose efforts towards a dialogue between Christianity and the East were thwarted by ecclesial politics. Merton remarks sadly that this was the "story of Christ in China: a kind of a brief epiphany of the Son of Man as a Chinese scholar." See Thomas Merton, *Mystics and Zen Masters* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1967), 90.

[8] For example, Merton wrote extensively on the issues of racism, nuclear war, violence and nonviolent resistance, the Holocaust, the American Civil Rights movement, the Vietnam war, colonialism, ecological crisis, interreligious dialogue, antisemitism, mistreatment of Native Americans, Cuban and Russian totalitarian regimes, etc. The people he engaged in dialogue are too numerous to list. They include the Dalai Lama, Dorothy Day, Catherine Doherty de Hueck, Erich Fromm, Czeslaw Milosz, Boris Pasternak, D. T. Suzuki, Thich Nhat Hanh, Amiya Charkravatry, and Abraham Joshua Heschel. This is a testimony not only to Merton's deep passion for justice and social transformation but also to his intentionality about engaging the Other as a way to deepen his own commitment as a monk and a member of the greater human whole. See, for example, Thomas Merton, *The Courage for Truth: Letters to Writers* (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1993); Thomas Merton, *Faith and Violence* (Notre Dame: Notre Dame Press, 1968); Thomas Merton, *Seeds of Destruction* (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1964); Thomas Merton, *The Hidden Ground of Love: The Letters of Thomas Merton on Religious Experience and Social Concerns* (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 2011).

[9] Thomas Del Prete, "The World Is in My Bloodstream: Merton on Relatedness and Community," in *4th General Conference of the Thomas Merton Society of Great Britain and Ireland* (Abergavenny, UK: Three Peaks Press, 2004).

[10] The theorists that were most influential in my learning of *zazen* and its application to the work of doing and teaching spiritual care include Shunryu Suzuki, *Zen Mind, Beginner's Mind* (New York: Weatherhill, 1970); Jon Kabat-Zinn, *Full Catastrophe Living: Using the Wisdom of Your Body and Mind to Face Stress, Pain, and Illness* (New York: Delacorte Press, 1990); Jon Kabat-Zinn, *Wherever You Go, There You Are: Mindfulness Meditation in Everyday Life* (New York: Hyperion, 1994); Joan Halifax, *Being with Dying: Cultivating Compassion and Fearlessness in the Presence of Death* (Boston: Shambhala, 2008); Joan Halifax, *The Fruitful Darkness: A Journey through Buddhist Practice and Tribal Wisdom* (New York: Grove Press, 2018); Pema Chodron, *The Pema Chodron Collection: The Wisdom of No Escape, Start Where You Are, When Things Fall Apart* (New York: One Spirit, 2003); Cheryl Giles and Lama Willa Miller, *The Arts of Contemplative Care: Pioneering Voices in Buddhist Chaplaincy and Pastoral Work* (Boston: Wisdom Publications, 2012).