

The Ground of Love and Truth: Reflections on Thomas Merton's Relationship with the Woman Known as "M"

Suzanne Zuercher

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Suzanne Zuercher, a Benedictine nun, was awakened one night with these words in her mind:

*It is impossible for the human heart
to be opened from outside;
and then someone comes along
and does just that.*

These words provided the impetus for Zuercher—whose previous book on Thomas Merton (*Merton: An Enneagram Profile*) proved to be a highly intuitive study of one of the most significant religious figures of the twentieth century—to set aside her reticence and write this intimate portrait of a spiritual giant whose journey to become a “complete human being” involved, surprisingly, the love of a woman. This love, Zuercher believes, “more than any other person or any other experience ... brought the spiritual master to embrace the fullness of his humanity.”

Bringing her own experience as a monastic, psychotherapist, and spiritual director to her task, Zuercher creates a sensitive portrayal of Merton’s struggle to reconcile his love for a woman twenty-five years younger than he with his vows of celibacy and commitment to monasticism. Based on his journal, *Learning to Love*, published over twenty-five years after his accidental death, Zuercher’s book reveals just how wounded and vulnerable—how human—Merton really was, and how, near the very end of his life, he came to see that “the ground of love and truth lies not in the abstract but in the physical reality of other human beings.”

KRISTINE MORRIS (Spring 2015)

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