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* * THOUGHTS ON "THE WAY OF CHUANG TZU" * *

The wisdom I have gained from my "forced recognition" behind bars allowed me to start to see that there exists more than one path to what I call Heaven. Of course my Catholic upbringing and continued dedication to that faith have laid out some pretty strict rules for me; rules which have their lines blurred as I get older and theoretically more wise.

From my novice investment in the teachings of Thomas Merton I have begun to see that he knew that there was indeed more than one path to our "Heaven". He unfolds Taoist teachings in "The Way of Chuang Tzu" with his deep understanding of what the Chinese scholar/mystic who wrote about 500 years before our Christ walked as a man, taught. When studying his examinations of human existence depicted in his (Chuang Tzu's) writings I found a deep wisdom that seemed in line with my faith. Merton's gentle picking apart of those ancient writings bring them even closer to that faith I feel lives in my heart, placed there by God I am certain. Another "path" to "our" Heaven. Not as exclusive as I once thought.

One of the stories of Chuang Tzu, "The Sacrificial Swine", really struck a chord with me on a couple of levels. Chuang Tzu writes,

"Then, reflecting, he considered the question from the pig's point of view: 'Of course, I suppose you would prefer to be fed with ordinary coarse feed and be left alone in your pen.'

But again, seeing it once more from his own viewpoint, he replied, 'No, definitely there is a nobler kind of existence! To live in honors, to receive the best treatment, to ride in a carriage with fine clothes, even though at any moment one may be disgraced or executed, that is the noble, though uncertain, destiny that I have chosen for myself.'

So he decided against the pigs' point of view, and adopted his own point of view, both for himself and for the pigs also.

How fortunate those swine, whose existence was thus ennobled by one who was at once an officer of the state and a minister of religion."

Merton explains to me that I can be both the swine and the minister of religion, that is our sinner's "Catholic Tao", but on this leg of my journey I feel much more like the sacrificial swine than the minister. Merton teaches;

"Chuang Tzu is not concerned with words or formulas about reality, but with the direct existential grasp of reality itself. Such a grasp is necessarily obscure and does not lend itself to abstract analysis. It can be presented in a parable, a fable, or a funny story about a conversation between two philosophers."

Or in a story about swine and the state. There are many paths to Heaven! Merton has brought me to a beginner's understanding of "hearing the Tao."