

compassion ...' (p. 206). It is fascinating to track the effect of his direct contact with the East on Merton's own Christian spiritual insight and on his understanding of the possibility for Western religious renewal.

Indeed, like so much of Merton's writing, it seems to reach us personally. In following Merton's encounter with the spiritual traditions of the East, we are encountered, opened up, see our own hidden hopes revealed.

Readers interested in charting Merton's continuing journey, in questions linking his Christianity and monastic perspective with the East, or in Merton's direct engagement with the world beyond Gethsemani and Louisville will appreciate and enjoy *The Other Side of the Mountain*. Brother Patrick Hart is an unobtrusive but sympathetic editor, who provides the minimum of necessary information to identify or clarify places, books, people and other references made by Merton.

The appearance of *The Other Side of the Mountain* culminates the posthumous publication of Merton's complete journal writings. Though it might seem to signify the ready availability of all significant Merton writing 30 years after his death, this is not the case. Anyone who has done research in the Merton archive at the Thomas Merton Studies Center at Bellarmine College knows that Merton's reading notebooks, as well as his teaching notes, among other more fragmentary pieces, provide additional insight into his thinking, into the sources he consulted and from which he learned, and through which he opened others to learning. And lying innocently on a notebook page here and there, ready to surprise, or to confront, or to evoke more wonder at the man, are Merton's momentary insights and responses to what he was reading, or, even more profoundly perhaps, a poem or intimation of a poem suggesting some deeper experience. To say that we have the full set of journals, as much as they may give us a scrupulous account of Merton's thought, does not mean that we can now fully know Merton. There is too much in between the words, too much underneath them and beside them.

They represent many places that we need to try to find for ourselves.

Thomas Del Prete

MERTON, Thomas. *The Merton Tapes*. Lectures Series, 7. Kansas City: Credence Cassettes, 1997–1998. 13 cassettes (60 minutes each). \$9.95 each.

1. 'Surrender to God' (AA 2904)
2. 'Poetry and Scripture' (AA 2905)
3. 'The Fully Human Being' (AA 2906)
4. 'Love Is Enough' (AA 2907)
5. 'Poetry: The Angelic Realm' (AA 2908)
6. 'Awakening the Heart' (AA 2911)
7. 'Facing the Truth of Life' (AA 2912)
8. 'Seeking and Finding God' (AA 2913)
9. 'The Door of Paradise' (AA 2914)
10. 'The Contemplative Call' (AA 2915)
11. 'The Desert God' (AA 3017)
12. 'Love and Purity of Heart' (AA 3018)
13. 'Poverty and Religious Experience' (AA 3019)

Visitors to Gethsemani often expressed surprise upon their arrival at the abbey. Monasteries, after all, were supposed to be somber, austere places. Laughter in a

monastery? Such a thing seemed entirely inappropriate. A similar sense of surprise awaits listeners of the newly released tapes in the Merton Lecture Series, for while Thomas Merton spent much of his monastic vocation questioning convention, and while he often affirmed traditional approaches, he also routinely revised our understanding of what was, in fact, appropriate.

Furthermore, as this latest release of lectures demonstrates, he also reminded us how to be effective. Merton was a brilliant and gifted teacher. In an age when the classroom has become more like a multi-media showcase, and college administrators scurry to get the curriculum online, Merton offers a valuable reminder that there is no substitute for human interaction. His lectures are funny, revealing as much about himself as his subject, and they are filled with remarkable insights. Most importantly, Merton does what any good teacher must do—in the short time given, he plants a seed within his students, then trusts that they will nurture it on their own. Students in Merton's classes for novices might have been laughing along with him, but it's certain that they were learning, too. In fact, as past *Merton Annual* reviews of these lectures have implied, the tapes are perhaps most valuable for what they reveal about Merton as a teacher.

If you teach, you know what good students expect from a lecturer. They want to listen to someone who is bright, familiar, passionate. They want someone with knowledge who knows how to impart that knowledge in a relevant manner. They want, most of all, to be instructed even as they are delighted. The laughter of Merton's students, and of Merton, on these tapes is beautiful. It's the surprised, happy sound of people revelling in ideas, in God and in one another. Merton's class must have been one of the highlights of the day for the novices, and the listener senses it was valuable for Merton as well.

One of Merton's particular gifts was the ability to appear comfortably unconventional in the most traditional of circumstances, and he makes the monastery classroom uniquely his. Merton saw himself as paradoxical man, and he's a paradoxical teacher. 'I'm no expert', he often tells the students, then proceeds to explicate a poem with vigorous passion and wit. 'I can't explain that', he says, then offers a series of wonderful analogies to make his point. A comparison of English and American parks, for example, is by turns a hilarious and brilliant lesson about the nuances of scriptural translation (AA 2905). A silly impersonation of Tarzan becomes a meditation on the innate simplicity and goodness of man (AA 2915). A summary of God's command to Lot—don't look back—turns into a gibe about the monastery's economy: 'Don't look back from the cheese business to the ham business! We got out of the ham business!' (AA 2904). A discussion of humility and humiliating tasks leads one novice to admit he's embarrassed about having to ask women to leave the cloister, and Merton responds 'I'd spend a whole day in church just in hopes I'd find a lady to ask to leave' (AA 2904), then offers a scatological comparison of barium enemas and purgation! Elsewhere, in a sympathetic discussion of chastity, Merton giggles when a novice admits he's shy around women, then says 'it's very easy to talk to women for three or four hours' (AA 2904).

At times Merton is incredulous; it seems students sometimes walked out of his classes, too. 'Gosh, everyone's leaving', he cries at one point (AA 3018). In talking about Hopkins, he asks 'You have read *these*, haven't you?' (AA 2908). And at all times, Merton pokes gentle fun at his students. 'Who was Plato?' he asks. 'Was he

an Irishman? Did he come before or after Christ?' There's a pause until a student finally guesses 'Before?' 'Great', says Merton. 'You're halfway to a PhD' (AA 3018). 'Cleaning up your soul is like sweeping the floor', Merton coaxes. 'The trick is getting the dust out of the corner, like Brother Martin back there' (AA 2907).

Yet Merton moves effortlessly between silliness and fits of giggling to fundamental expressions of basic theology, from mock chastisements to brilliant insights. 'I wouldn't go near Las Vegas with a suit of armor on', he laughs in discussing the appreciation of popular culture, then moves into a serious reminder that temptation often aids the soul's willingness to persevere (AA 2904). 'Sartre is a very bad man, a nasty man! Don't ever read him', jokes Merton before reminding his students of the simple truth that 'a person cannot exist for himself; he has to exist for others' (AA 3018). In short, the Thomas Merton revealed on these tapes is a Merton you may not know, but your discovery of him is sure to delight you.

That's not to suggest that the tapes aren't an important contribution to Merton studies; they are. Yet if the listener is hoping for careful, methodical explications and polished revelations, or rehearsed readings of passages from Merton's own writing, he'd better listen elsewhere. The lectures are as frustrating as they are enlightening. Past reviews of the tape series have complained about the lack of chronological development, dating, logical catalog numbers, and useful liner notes, and this criticism is still warranted. Often Merton mentions a previous lecture that we've not heard, and he makes comical allusions to events, people and places within the monastery that we don't know. Credence supplies a content summary of one or two sentences on each cassette sleeve, and a narrator offers a perfunctory introduction, yet there is nothing to place the lectures in any kind of context; we're only told that these are talks Merton gave to the novices throughout the 1960s. The titles of each tape are often broad and vague, and the lectures often veer away from what the titles imply. This is, of course, a quibble, for the real value of the tapes lies in associating a voice, and a style of teaching, with the name that did so much to change our perception of the religious life.

So, once one gets past the surprise of the humor, once one takes for granted the discovery of the voice, does anything of lasting value remain? Are the tapes only a novelty? I don't think so. If you want to improve your own teaching, listen to these tapes. AA 2906 offers perhaps the best condensed comparison of Western and Eastern philosophy I've ever heard. If you want inspiration about the value of suffering and the paradoxical nature of desire, listen to these tapes. Merton's reading of Philoxenus, his comments on Sufi philosophy and his summary of St Bernard lend ancient texts a remarkable sense of contemporary relevance. If you want familiar Merton commentary on vocation, solitude and the relationship between contemplation and action, it's all here. Above all, if you need to be reminded of the enduring presence of God's grace and love in the modern world, the tapes offer wonderful support for your own vocation.

'Most people', says Merton, 'do not realize how precious the image of God within us is' (AA 2904). 'Every moment is an occasion of love given by God' (AA 3018). 'We are attaining all along the means for which we were created—living the mystery of Christ' (AA 3019). 'There is so much skepticism; sometimes there has to be a commitment' (AA 2905). 'Crisis is the time of growth!' (AA 2915). At the heart of every one of these 30-minute talks is a simple, fundamental reminder of what matters—to Merton, to the monks of Gethsemani, to the Church, to the world.

In his life, and in his vocation, Merton proved masterful in bridging the gap between seemingly irreconcilable opposites. In an old church, and in an old way of living, he injected a sense of the new. In a secular world corrupted by war and social injustice, he delivered a message of peace and understanding. In a time of cautious ecumenism, he boldly embraced the truths of the East to further affirm the truths of the West. And from a silent vantage point, his words were heard by millions. How fitting, then, that even in death, Merton's voice has been preserved; how appropriate, that in the era of the sound byte, we have in these tapes so many little nuggets of wisdom and joy.

Oh, these tapes aren't a cornerstone of Merton studies. They don't represent his best work, his best ideas. Yet they do represent a special invitation, for like the words of any great teacher, they beckon us to come closer, to listen, to see more deeply for ourselves. They continue to be an important part of any Merton library.

David King

INCHAUSTI, Robert, *Thomas Merton's American Prophecy* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1998), pp. 210. ISBN 0-7914-3635-7 (paperback). \$19.95.

Robert Inchausti skillfully weaves together two competing narrative lines in his refreshing and compelling story, *Thomas Merton's American Prophecy*. First, Inchausti moves Merton out of the familiar and safe harbor of the Catholic tradition and into the mainstream of American literary and intellectual history. In doing so, Inchausti rediscovers, secondly, Merton's crucial place in the tradition of Catholic monasticism and, more importantly, the vitality of Merton's contemplative spirituality as a viable alternative to prevailing twentieth-century ideologies, including the empty security of materialism and the false promises of progress, the audacious desperation of modernism and, most recently, postmodernism's invitation to plunge into a free fall of disbelief. By locating Merton on the American literary landscape, Inchausti is one of the first critics to develop fully Merton's place in the tradition of dissenting individualism that scribes an arc in American literary history from William Bradford and John Winthrop, through Thoreau and Emily Dickinson, to Ralph Ellison and Rachel Carson. Merton can then be viewed as belonging to and extending the lineage of American writers who, driven by moral resolve and the pull of conscience, drift to the margins of society where they answer the ethical call to critique the culture of conformism at the soft core of American life.

Inchausti understands Merton well enough, however, that he wisely develops his argument about Merton's place on the literary map dialectically, in *contradistinction* to dominant trends in American letters. The Merton that emerges, then, is both an apostle of American adversarial literary culture and its dissenter—an expatriate very much at home in the American woods, a Henry Miller with a halo. As Merton himself says, '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 a word, Robert Inchausti's Merton is an American original who struggles to find a 'quiet but articulate place' where he can navigate a personal search for