

NUGENT, Robert, *Silence Speaks: Teilhard de Chardin, Yves Congar, John Courtney Murray, and Thomas Merton* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 2011), pp. viii + 144. ISBN 978-0-8091-4649-9 (paper) \$14.95.

This book by Robert Nugent is an important contribution to the theme of the most recent ITMS conference and consequently of this volume of *The Merton Annual*. Both conference and journal, in various ways, focus our attention on the relationship between the individual and society. *Silence Speaks* presents the marginalized voices of four Roman Catholics who challenged and eventually changed the Church that sought to silence them. The cover photo of steps half-shaded and half-illuminated provides an apt reminder that humanity's ascent into Truth is challenged by seemingly endless obstacles and yet blessed with unending grace that sheds sufficient light to reveal the path for today. Censorship is the fine line that subtly marks the intersection of shadow and light. To be sure, censorship is a burden to those on whom it is imposed. It may, however, be a necessary prompt for the silence of the human heart to speak with new insights and questions that will guide the pilgrim Church. As they endured the burden of censorship, Teilhard de Chardin, Yves Congar, John Courtney Murray and Thomas Merton would come to exemplify the Christian virtues of Faith, Hope and Love and thereby rise above the misunderstandings, accusations and conflicts that preceded and followed their silencing by the Church they loved and sought to serve. Nugent underscores this at the outset with a quotation from Father Bernard Haring:

I love the Church because Christ loved it, love it to her utmost extreme. I love it even when I discover painful attitudes and structures, which I do not find in harmony with the Gospel. I love it as it is because Christ also loved me with all my imperfections, with all my shadows and constantly gives me the first fruits of the Kingdom so that my love may correspond to his eternal plan. . . . Christ and the Church with him remind me of all the limitless evidence of love, grace and mercy. In this the Church helps me to form a grateful memory. If we open ourselves to this and gratefully remember all the good, which has flowed to us in the Church, and constantly flows to us, then we can and will all succeed in giving even the suffering from the Church its place in the heart of Jesus. (iii-iv)

Theologian Richard Gaillardetz provides a fine introduction that situates Nugent's book within the history of the Church's censorship of theologians. His brief history points out that the accusations for departing from "the unchangeable doctrine of the church" (1) must be considered in light

of a particular ecclesiological framework. Noting the rise of ultramontan-ism in the nineteenth century, Gaillardetz clarifies that situation in which Teilhard, Congar, Murray and Merton lived and worked, a situation that he critically examines and finds insufficient for and detrimental to the life and work of the Church. His clarification of the work of the theologian and the potentially collaborative relationship of Catholic theologians with the college of bishops eventually unfolds into a proposal for change. The change that Gaillardetz proposes would safeguard the integrity of the apostolic faith (the responsibility of bishops) and the freedom to explore and discover the depths of that faith in the context of changing times that raise new questions and shed new light (the work of theologians).

Nugent organizes his book in four chapters, one chapter for each of the four men: “Teilhard de Chardin and the Holy Office”; “Yves Congar: Apostle of Patience”; “The Censuring of John Courtney Murray”; and “Thomas Merton: The Silenced Monk.” While different in various ways, the four men have one thing in common. Each in his own way explored the depths of the Apostolic Faith with every intention to be faithful to the Church and of service to the world. Yet it was that commitment that brought them into conflict with the authorities in Rome. Teilhard de Chardin’s effort to harmonize a modern scientific view of the world with the Church’s teachings on humankind would lead to the 1962 reprimand by Rome denouncing his works:

The above-mentioned works abound in such ambiguities and indeed even serious errors, as to offend Catholic doctrine. . . . For this reason, the most eminent and most reverend Fathers of the Holy Office exhort all Ordinaries as well as the superiors of Religious institutes, rectors of seminaries and presidents of universities, effectively to protect the minds, particularly of the youth, against the dangers presented by the works of Fr. Teilhard de Chardin and his followers. (*Warning Considering the Writings of Father Teilhard de Chardin*, Sacred Congregation of the Holy Office, June 30, 1962)

Yves Congar’s commitment to the ecumenical movement and in particular his role as a driving force in the French worker-priest movement resulted in the Church disallowing him to teach or publish for two years. John Courtney Murray’s interest in religious freedom in the modern state and his re-examination of Catholic doctrines on church/state relations resulted in conflict with Rome and the Vatican’s demand in 1954 that he stop publishing. All three men continued to write. Their ideas continue to be discussed. Their efforts to bring the Church into dialogue with the world of the twentieth and now twenty-first centuries were eventually successful and in some

cases contributed to the shape of the Second Vatican Council.

Nugent's chapter on Merton provides a detailed account of Merton's relationship with censors. The relationship reaches a breaking point over his writings on peace and justice. He was silenced. And, as is well known, he obediently found a way to continue writing. What are we to make of this contradiction? How did he in good conscience both obey and circumvent the orders of his superiors? Why did Merton feel compelled to be both silent and vocal? Nugent explains, "Merton was . . . deeply concerned about what he called complicity in observing the silencing, and at the same time what effect his disobeying the silence would have on others" (89). Merton's interior struggle with the censors is reflected in his book entitled *Vow of Conversation*:

silent complicity is presented as a greater good than honest, conscientious protest. This is supposed to be part of my vowed life and this is supposed to give glory to God. Certainly I refuse complicity. My silence itself is a protest and those who know me are aware of the fact. I have at least been able to write enough to define the meaning of my silence. Apparently, I cannot leave here in order to protest, since the meaning of any protest depends on my staying here, or does it? This is a great question.¹

Merton lived questions – questions that oftentimes emerged from contradictions that existed within him. Perhaps this is one of the most valuable lessons one may find in Merton's life and work. If one is to be both faithful to the Church and true to oneself, one must live the questions and embody the contradictions rather than try to craft all-too-simple answers that are no answers at all, or resolve the contradiction by rejecting one of the two opposing sides. Nugent's chapter on Merton allows us to see and understand how the silence of this monk would eventually speak volumes.

The book ends with an epilogue that integrates the insights that Nugent has gained by comparing and contrasting the lives and work of these four men. This book comes at an important moment in our history. We are deeply indebted to these four men. Their courage, faithfulness and work leave an invaluable legacy. Nugent has reminded us that their legacy is our inheritance. It is now up to us to raise our voices on a whole host of contemporary issues, not out of anger and contempt, but with the same fidelity to Faith, endurance of Hope and redeeming Love that is the hallmark of the Church we serve.

David Joseph Belcastro

1. Thomas Merton, *A Vow of Conversation: Journals 1964-1965*, ed. Naomi Burton Stone (New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 1988) 28 [March 3, 1964] (quoted in Nugent 88).