

as a brother of other creators. Let us continue creating and struggling for the truth and the kingdom of God."

And to another Nicaraguan writer, Alfonso Cortes, Merton sums up his sense of the mission of the poet: "It is truly the task of the poet to teach the ways of truth in the language of beauty." Such a task requires courage, Merton proclaims to José Coronel Urtecho, because poets "remain almost the only ones who have anything to say. . . . They have the courage to disbelieve what is shouted with the greatest amount of noise from every loudspeaker; and it is this courage that is most of all necessary today."

This volume of Merton's letters, like the other volumes in the series, is filled with flashes of Merton's humor, irony, outrageous wit. It also reveals his preoccupation with never having enough time to get things done and his frustration with policies and practices within the monastery. But for the most part, *The Courage for Truth* gives us Thomas Merton at home with his own kind of creator: the writer. There is quite a lot of repetition—but how could there not be in anyone who wrote so many letters?

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Thomas Merton. *The Merton Tapes: Fifth Release of Lectures*. Kansas City: Credence Cassettes. 1993. 6 Cassettes (60 min. each).

Reviewed by Steven L. Baumann.

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Credence Cassettes' recently released (1993) tapes of Thomas Merton, originally recorded at the Abbey of Our Lady of Gethsemani during the 1960s, provide a unique access to key aspects of the history of monasticism and Catholic spirituality. A narrator states that the tapes were made for the benefit of the community of monks at Gethsemani. But the content and presentation transcends time and audience surprisingly well, except for Merton's use of noninclusive language, for example, the use of the term "man" to refer to human beings.

Like earlier tapes released by Credence Cassettes, these lectures reveal Thomas Merton to be a master educator and spiritual director. Merton's use of terms is superbly clear and well defined, so that an audience with limited familiarity with philosophy or Church history

can follow and gain keen insights. Merton's humor and spontaneity come through far more in audiotape than in his edited and censored books. What the tapes lack in detail and comprehensiveness they make up in honesty and straightforwardness, the ability to get to the heart of the matter.

Technically the tapes have a few minor problems. For example, while the recorded quality of Thomas Merton's voice is exceptional the responses of his audience, a group of novices, are hard or impossible to hear. The tapes lack an outline or clear order, which might have helped the listener overcome minor problems created by editing and abrupt conclusions to some of the lectures.

The titles and topics of the tapes in the order in which they are coded are: "Obedience: A Means of Letting Go" (AA2616); "The Way of St. Basil" (AA2617); "St. Anselm: Reasonable Faith" (AA2618); "Created for Love" (AA2619); "In the Arms of God" (AA2620); and "Abelard's Loving Criticism" (AA2621). Thomas Merton's discussion of St. Anselm's "reasonable faith" (AA2618) exemplifies the value of these tapes and the gifts of the lecturer. By carefully situating the teaching of St. Anselm in its historical context, both secular and religious, and providing some useful reflections on the inner journey of St. Anselm, Merton provides the listener with considerable understanding of Anselm's struggles in a way that can give direction for spiritual growth and renewal today.

Merton's comments on the importance of integrating faith and reason and his discussion of Abelard's insistence on critical thinking (AA2621) are instructive. When Merton talks about St. Anselm's ability to combine philosophy and mysticism, writing and prayer, it is hard not to draw parallels to Merton himself as a "monk who thinks originally." He challenges the receptive listener to try to do the same. Merton's discussion of Anselm's ontological argument is a bit rushed and unfinished. St. Bernard's mystical theology and his understanding of the will of God underpin the tapes entitled "Created for Love" and "In the Arms of God." Merton's discussions of the writings of St. Bernard provide a vital retelling of the power of faith in the goodness and dignity of human being, the availability and effectiveness of grace, and the importance of "setting order in love."

The consequences of disordered love seem far more pressing today than at the time these conferences were given by Merton. He makes some intriguing and insightful comments, although somewhat

dated, on history, science, psychology, advertising, and world politics. His comments on Buddhist, Hindu, and Muslim religious traditions reveal his considerable knowledge and respect for these religions and hint at the value of interfaith dialogues and exchanges.

In summary, these lectures make a valuable contribution to the work by or about Thomas Merton, which continues to speak to the challenges of being a Christian today.

Ron Seitz. *Song for Nobody: A Memory Vision of Thomas Merton*. Liguori, Missouri: Triumph Books, 1993. 188 pages. \$19.95 hardcover.

Reviewed by Thomas F. McKenna, C.M.

In a work of prose and poetry, Ron Seitz sketches the wavy yet firm lines of his ten-year friendship with Thomas Merton. His book is as much autobiography as biography as it probes the rich, transforming, and even numinous experience of two gifted people mixing souls. It is a story of apprenticeship—lessons in the poet's craft, directions for following the gospel, wisdoms for living life deeply. Seitz is the journeyman and Merton the master as the disciple recounts the deepening of their bond over the monk's final years.

Seitz frames his account around two days. The first is a week after Merton's death. The author sits alone through a dark and bitter cold night and struggles to come to terms with his mentor's passing. The second is another winter's day twenty years later, during which he wanders across Gethsemani's grounds kicking over memory stones to discover what of Merton lies underneath. Seitz writes, of course, from memory. But it is one that he has fed and cultivated. There are letters and cards Merton wrote him, notes and journals he kept before and after the death, conversations with mutual friends, two decades of reminiscing and mulling—all passed through the many-hued palette of Seitz's imagination. It is this last that Seitz claims gives his recollection special power and truth. In his own words, this is a "memory vision" of Merton, a remembrance "of what it was to have touched Tom in our passing-thru" (28).

The first day chronicles the rawness of loss and, to a lesser degree, the balm of remembrance. With Merton's other close friends,