

expressive images are those of the intense Merton (pp.14, 15,31,60), the smiling Trappist (p.38), of Merton playing the bongo, puckish cenobite with a raised thyrsus (p.19), and Merton with the thyrsus and his face lifted upward. There is Merton in his habit, hooded, a barn behind him, staring far away into the woods quietened by the fading light—a picture of silence and solitude.

The most intriguing portraits, however, are the blurred, multi-exposure, and superimposed images, totally different from those taken by others such as Ed Rice, James Forest, or John Howard Griffin. They are also the most challenging ones in the book. "When," Merton asserts, "one is too intent on 'being himself' he runs the risk of impersonating shadows" (*DS*, p. 31). Are these images a visual representation of Merton's remark, as well as of his struggle to empty himself of masks and shadows—"the created person?" (*DS*, p. 28). Quite possibly, Meatyard's camera, set to see in a certain way so that much is left to chance, suggests the futile attempt to capture kaleidoscopic Merton's "naked face." Perhaps, the portraits are an expressive and evocative gesture toward the universal in Merton. Man, "not limited to form. He is more./He can attain formlessness," are the poet's words in "Wholeness."¹⁷ Or, is Meatyard trying to explore Merton's "compelling necessity...to be free to embrace the necessity of my own nature" (*DS*, p. 33). Through the monk, the photographer might as well be trying to embrace the necessity of his own nature. How would he like to be looking and what is the compelling necessity of his own nature are haunting questions for Thomas Merton. And the greatly photographed contemplative gives his own answer, "There Christ develops your life into Himself like a photograph" (*NSOC*, p. 162).

Mary Luke Tobin, S.L.

**PRAYER AND COMMITMENT IN THOMAS MERTON
PROPHECY AND COMMITMENT IN THOMAS MERTON**

Kansas City, Missouri: Credence Cassettes, 1991

Two 75 minute cassette tapes, each for \$8.95

Reviewed by Ruth M. Fox, O.S.B.

17. Thomas Merton, *The Collected Poems of Thomas Merton*, (NY: New Directions, 1970), p. 931.

These two cassette tapes on prayer and prophecy bring to us some of the compelling thought of Thomas Merton presented through the experience and voice of one of his friends, Sister Mary Luke Tobin, a Sister of Loretto. Here we have combined, in over two hours of listening, the rich legacy of a man and a woman of the Church, both of whom are extraordinary prophets for our time.

If the listener is anticipating in these talks a systematic and ordered presentation of Merton's theology of prayer and prophecy, or a scholarly analysis of Merton as a prophet and a man of prayer, that listener will be disappointed. If the listener is prepared to hear Tobin, as a personal friend of Merton, share with excitement and enthusiasm her personal remembrances of Merton, interwoven with her own insights and impromptu digressions, that person will be delighted.

Although the tapes were made at a conference (November 3, 1990, at Nazareth College, Rochester, NY), the style may seem more suited to living room than conference room. Sr. Mary Luke is sharing as any friend would, not too orderly, but very personally. In fact, in these tapes it is sometimes difficult to tell where one voice begins and the other ends. The thoughts of Merton are intertwined with the thoughts of Tobin in this enchanting Presentation of this now 83 year old woman.

TAPE 1: PROPHECY AND COMMITMENT

Tobin begins her presentation by teaching her audience a short song based on the Hebrew Scripture: "For everyone 'neath their vine and fig tree shall live in peace and unafraid. Into plowshares turn your swords; nations shall make war no more." As she herself admits, she does not have a good singing voice, but her enthusiasm sweeps the crowd into joining her in the simple melody. This not only introduces the theme but also sets the tone for the informality of her talk.

Tobin then begins the presentation by explaining Merton's concept of "commitment": God makes a promise and we respond in an ongoing relationship of listening, believing, and trusting. She then weaves in and out of Merton's thoughts on prophets, expanding them with material from other sources including Daniel Berrigan and Abraham Heschel. She does not hesitate to add her own reflections on what Merton the prophet would say to our society today, regarding violence, war-based economy, alienation, and peace. Several of her quotations of Merton invite the listener to stop the tape to listen again, for example: "A prophet is one who rocks the boat, but not by telling

slaves to be free, but by telling people who think they are free that they are slaves."

This tape concludes with Tobin introducing three areas in which Merton was ahead of his time. Whether the tape time or her speaking time expired, the listener hears of only two of these themes: ecology and feminism.

TAPE 2: PRAYER AND COMMITMENT IN THOMAS MERTON

Mary Luke Tobin begins this presentation by noting how Merton's thought was based on the foundation of changeless Tradition, but adapted to the changing times. To set a broad perspective, she reads from the Dalai Lama's autobiography his impressions of Thomas Merton from their meeting in 1968. She then proceeds to discuss Merton's teachings on prayer in chronological order from the time that she made his acquaintance in 1959 until his death in 1968. Her major early source is Merton's talks on prayer to the novices of her community of Loretto. She comments that Merton offered no method of prayer to the novices, but invited them to recognize the presence of God within them.

Tobin reflects that Merton's next development came in the area of the concept of the true self versus the false self. In the 60's Merton also began to intensify his study and relationships with other traditions, especially those of the East, to enrich his own deeply loved Christian/Catholic tradition. She spends considerable time with Sufi spirituality and attempts to teach her audience a short Sufi song. Finally Tobin offers her comments on Merton's last words at Bangkok. She suggests that his final words in conversation sum up his teaching on prayer: "What we are asked to do is to so let God live in us that others may feel God and come to believe in God because they feel how God lives in us."

REFLECTIONS

It is certainly fitting that the Providence of God brought these two dynamic religious leaders together in the 1960's. Thomas Merton and Mary Luke Tobin were members of two religious communities situated within twelve miles of each other in rural Kentucky. From this unlikely pulpit in the wooded knobs of Gethsemani Abbey and the convent of the Sisters of Loretto, the voice of this contemplative, cloistered Trappist hermit/monk and the voice

of this apostolic woman religious have made their lasting influence in the Church.

How did Sr. Mary Luke Tobin come to meet the Trappist Thomas Merton? She describes the first occasion in her autobiography, *Hope Is an Open Door* (Abingdon, 1981). Thomas Merton was looking for an opportunity for a friend of his, Daniel Walsh, to give some philosophy lectures in the area, and inquired if he could speak to the Sisters of Loretto. "I remember the bright October day in 1959, when Merton, wearing his white monk's habit, and Dan Walsh, jaunty in his Irish hat, swung up the walk between the tall oaks at our motherhouse" (p. 69). That day began nine years of exchange and friendship between Merton and Tobin, who was the major superior of the 750 member Sisters of Loretto at that time.

Following that first meeting, Tobin invited Merton to come to her community on several occasions to present lectures—to the novices, or to the older sisters, or to the administration. "He came when he could, and although he always protected his solitude and his seclusion, he and we enjoyed those occasional conversational exchanges" (*Hope*, p. 71). Merton also began sending tapes (which are now housed in the Merton Collection at Bellarmine Library, Louisville, KY) and copies of mimeographed articles to her. In 1962 he offered to write an essay in honor of the sesquicentennial of Loretto.

Of course the 60's were the time of great renewal and turbulence as many changes bombarded religious life. Tobin frequently consulted with Merton to ask for his insights and wisdom. When the Sisters of Loretto rewrote their constitution, Tobin asked Merton to give them a critique, which he did with a two hour taped commentary. She writes, "Merton saw the religious community as a place of love and truth, where persons could come to redefine themselves in a situation that gives them space to detect the deceptive systems and false values prevailing in society" (*Hope*, p. 85). In his typical manner, he challenged the sisters to live their dedication in freedom, flexibility, and openness to the Spirit.

But the input and learning was not all one direction, for Tobin also did some sharing with the community at Gethsemani. Merton recorded memories of several such visits in his journal for 1964-65, *A Vow of Conversation* (Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 1988). Most of her visits were related to information she was sharing on her experiences at Vatican II. Tobin was the only American woman and one of fifteen worldwide who was invited as an observer to the Vatican Council. On September 15, 1964, Merton wrote, "Mother Luke from Loretto was here for a talk before going to Rome. The Third Session of

the Council opened yesterday. She will consult with Cardinal Suenens and he is trying to arrange some way in which nuns can be represented on the sacred congregations" (*Vow*, p. 79).

On December 10, 1964, he recorded a visit after her return from the first session she attended:

Sister Luke came over from Loretto to talk to a dozen of us about the Council. She was the American woman auditor there this last session, one of the first group of such observers. Talking to her made the session very understandable, even the last couple of days, which were pretty ferocious. The great question is, what was Pope Paul trying to do? Was he supporting the conservatives against the liberals? Is he proving himself a "transition Pope" (whatever that means)? My guess is that he was simply trying, by means of curial politics, to keep things together as far as possible. But it also seems to me that he was much more acquiescent to the conservatives and their desires than to the liberals (*Vow*, p. 113).

As an afterthought the next day, he added the following comment: "Sister Luke said that Archbishop Roberts, S.J., was not even allowed to give his intervention in the Council on conscientious objection. Can this be true? ..." (*Vow*, p. 113).

The entry in Merton's journal of January 19, 1965, indicates that Tobin was asking Merton for his advice and input for her role on a Council subcommittee. It also indicates the important role that Tobin was given, as one of the three women appointed to a planning commission to prepare the documents on the church in the world and on the laity:

Sister Luke came over with him [Father Illtud Evans] from Loretto yesterday. She is now on a subcommittee working on Schema 13 for the Council, one of the first women to be in such a position, and she wanted to talk about the work of the committee and the schema. I gave her what ideas I had, and I think that as long as they don't take account of the real problem posed by technology, anything they say or do will be beside the point (*Vow*, p. 135).

Of this exchange of visits, Tobin records in her autobiography how Merton's concerns helped her to sharpen her own critique of the

Council sessions. "Thomas Merton, our neighbor and consultant, had alerted me to his great concern about any statements the bishops might make on war or disarmament, so I was keenly interested in listening to the discussion of that subject" (*Hope*, p. 23).

Contrary to what we might expect, there is no indication that Merton was envious of Tobin's privileged position as an auditor and consultant at the historic Council. Nor did he talk down to her theologically in any way, according to his journal and her autobiography. Rather, we get here a glimpse of the sharing of two friends, in mutual respect, each serving the Church according to their call. Tobin at this time was not only the major superior of the Sisters of Loretto but also president of the National Conference of Major Superiors of Women (the predecessor of the Leadership Conference of Women Religious).

While Tobin was traveling back and forth to Rome, Merton was in the time of transition to becoming a full time hermit in a cottage on the grounds of Gethsemani. For him it was a time of "happiness in the sense of having arrived at last in the place destined for me by God; of fulfilling the purpose for which I was brought here twenty-three years ago" (December 16, 1964, *Vow*, p. 114).

Thus while Merton was becoming more physically withdrawn from the "world" in the latter part of the 1960's, Tobin and her community were becoming increasingly involved in social justice issues. She explains: "Three things helped shape my emerging consciousness of the war/peace issue, . . . the statements of Vatican II; the increasingly vigorous resolutions of my own religious community; and the insights of Thomas Merton" (*Hope*, p. 93). She does not hesitate to give Merton the credit for helping to crystallize her own insights into the relationship, between prayer and social action.

She seemed somewhat surprised by the apparent shift in Merton's emphasis, but nevertheless, she adopted his rationale. "I had been captivated by Thomas Merton's poetic expressions describing prayer and his reflections on mysticism. I was surprised, then, and a little shocked, when he began to write less about personal prayer experience and more about the harsh realities of racism and war. He was clearly sensitive to the nuclear danger as early as 1961" (*Hope*, p. 92). His sensitivity as expressed in his writings "were a constant and sturdy support for my own evolution. . . . His articulation of a prophetic vision in these works was the vital and supportive rationale I needed to stiffen my own spine in the difficult confrontations of the late 1960's" (*Hope*, p. 83).

One example of how well she carried Merton's reflections into action occurred in 1967 when the Sisters of Loretto, of which body she was the superior, took a corporate stand against the Vietnam war (*Hope*, p. 60), a very unusual action at that time when most religious communities were not yet taking public stands on social issues.

This influence of Merton on his friend continued in the years beyond his death. In 1972 Tobin led a prayer service at the stockholders' meeting of Honeywell, Inc. in St. Paul, MN, to protest their production of antipersonnel weapons for Vietnam. That same year she lobbied on Capitol Hill. For refusing to leave a prayer service (led by Abraham Heschel) in the rotunda at closing time, she was arrested and jailed. In 1973 she made a peace pilgrimage to Europe with religious leaders to meet with officials of European churches. She joined the national staff of Church Women United, and visited Thailand, Vietnam and Hiroshima on their behalf in 1974 (*Hope*, p. 99-114). These and other examples show her continuing fearlessness and leadership in addressing the social problems of the time. We can only guess that if Merton had been alive then, he would have given her great encouragement.

Yet Tobin is the first to say that her ability to take action comes out of prayer, personal daily prayer centered on the presence of God. Even though she is now in her 80's—an age when no one would fault her for watching and praying for the world from her rocking chair—she is driven to continue her work or justice:

I might have to dialogue with an official of Rocky Flats, the nuclear production facility near here [Denver], about the pollution his facility is causing. Or it might be a dialogue on the insecticide used on farms or the lack of toilet facilities for farm workers. There are many, many concerns such as these, and often they are the concerns of people who don't have what we have, who are suffering through deprivation. I think the gospel asks us to act on their behalf. To take this kind of action, I need to ready myself with prayer. (Coffey, Kathy, "Prayer and Action, Action and Prayer: An Interview with Mary Luke Tobin." *Praying*, March-April, 1990: 18-22.)

Currently Mary Luke Tobin's ministry of prayer and action radiates out of Denver, CO, where she is coordinator of the Thomas Merton Center for Creative Exchange (which she founded). The friendship based on respect and mutual support begun between Merton and Tobin in 1959 continues to enrich us to this day as we taste the

fruits of the rich combination of masculine/feminine, contemplation/action, prayer/justice, monastic/apostolic. As we seek to combine the polarities we find in ourselves as well as in the world, we can say with Merton, "When I pray I am, in a certain sense, everybody" (*Thomas Merton in Alaska: The Alaskan Conferences*. New York: New Directions, 1989).

Annice Callahan, R.S.C.J.

SPIRITUAL GUIDES FOR TODAY:

Evelyn Underhill, Dorothy Day, Karl Rahner,
Simone Weil, Thomas Merton, Henri Nouwen

New York: Crossroad, 1992 - \$11.95

Reviewed by George A. Kilcourse

Amid an avalanche of new spirituality studies, Annice Callahan has assembled a detailed mosaic of three women and three men who personify the Catholic ethos. *Spiritual Guides for Today* builds upon the strength of her earlier work, *Karl Rahner's Spirituality of the Pierced Heart*, and the recent collection which she edited, *Spiritualities of the Heart*. The six diverse authors examined here reveal the mystery of God's love in their unique biographies. Callahan, a professor of spiritual theology at Regis College in Toronto, analyzes how the substantial writings of each invite readers to get in touch with their own hearts in order to, in turn, help others get in touch with theirs.

The lens for this study is Karl Rahner's spirituality of the heart. The German Jesuit identified the heart as the place where our freedom, consciousness, and affectivity ultimately dwell. In his vision of the spiritual life, the heart is the place to surrender to God; even in Jesus' heart is the center of freedom where he surrenders to the incomprehensible mystery of God. In the case of Dorothy Day, Rahner himself, and Simone Weil, Callahan explicitly explores five "attitudes of the heart" that qualify them as spiritual guides; she examines five aspects of spiritual life or particular insights that qualify Underhill, Merton, and Nouwen for this same role.