
Michael Toms, producer. *Thomas Merton Remembered: Dialogues with Various People Who Knew Him*. Radio Program no. 2476 of *New Dimensions: The Sound of a New World Emerging*. San Francisco: New Dimensions Foundation, 1994. 1 Cassette (2 sides) 60 min. (P. O. Box 410510, San Francisco, CA 94141-0510)

Reviewed by Dewey Weiss Kramer

The *New Dimensions* radio series, of which this tape is program no. 2476, aims to transform the world by transforming human consciousness. As "one of the few genuine spiritual masters that America has produced," Thomas Merton clearly belongs in the series.

Producer and host of this program Michael Toms hopes to uncover the reason for Merton's increasing popularity decades after his death. Accordingly, he asks each of the six friends of Merton whom he interviews to consider this question among other matters, and concludes each interview with an invitation to express the overriding impression Merton left with each of them. This probing sheds new light on the nature of Merton's influence on latter day readers. Thus, while the tape is intended as introduction to the man and his work, it goes far beyond that modest intent.

As Introduction

It *is*, however, a fine introduction to the man and his work for several reasons. First, the connecting apparatus by Michael Toms offers basic orientation, facts on life and works, even a minimal bibliography. Second, it does a good job of placing him in his context. The connecting interludes of Gethsemani prayer give a better-than-usual sense of the monastic climate, with its liturgy, concern for the world, humor, and art. Third, since Toms is interested in Merton's status as potential *guide* for seekers, his questions draw out information that informs on an existential level. Finally, the balanced and representative choice of interviewees informs listeners of Merton's diverse roles and interests: the monk and his community (Abbot Timothy Kelly, Br. Paul Quenon, Fr. Matthew Kelty, Br. Patrick Hart, three of whom were novices under Merton); the monk-poet (poet Ron Seitz, Quenon); the

metier of writing (Patrick Hart); and the tie to the extra-monastic world of families and children as well as the Merton "literary business" (Tommy O'Callahan, Hart, Seitz). These persons played key roles in his life, and capturing them on tape provides a valuable archival service.

New Insights

Each interview is interesting. But those with Quenon and Kelty are especially important. For in the course of their presentations, both men talk their way toward a dimension of Merton as he exists today, a dimension that has not previously been articulated so well.

Paul Quenon's interview begins with reference to the typical monastic day, and his reflections on Merton continue within the monastic framework—Merton present within the Gethsemani community, working for it, furthering it, forming it into a "communion of charity." Merton brought to this community "a confidence you live with the rest of your life, that there is a loving God. He convinces you. That is what he said, and what remains." Quenon's conviction of this on-going presence is supported, "proven," as it were, by his concluding story. On the evening that the community learned of Merton's death, Quenon returned to the chapter room and found a holy card lying there. And on the reverse side, in Merton's handwriting, was written: "Charity does not fall away." Producer Toms, recognizing the singular significance of that event, prefaces the entire program with this portion of Quenon's interview.

Matthew Kelty's reminiscence starts out somewhat disappointingly for someone acquainted with his own work. The recounting of humorous anecdotes illustrative of Merton's ineptitude in practical matters seems to belie the profound author of *Flute Solo* and *My Song Is of Mercy*. Similarly, his initial answer to host Tom's *leit-motivic* question is also rather predictable—Merton is a modern man.

But then the gifted speaker breaks through. Musing on what "modern" means here, Kelty throws out phrase after fragmentary phrase of loss and alienation and suffering, the very fragmentary nature of the musing imaging forth the broken reality of the world from which Merton came and to which he turned his compassionate concern. It is a moving evocation of Merton as "the man for others."

In his final comments, Kelty articulates even more clearly the *representative* nature of this man Merton, drawing on T. S. Eliot's

powerful image of Christ present in the world. Merton was "wounded . . . , the wounded healer . . . ; who is, of course, . . . the perfect man of compassion." Quenon and Kelty both develop, therefore, as source of the continuing and increasing popularity of the *writings*, the on-going presence of the *man* as real presence, a presence not restricted to the memories of those who knew him but actual to those whom he continues to enfold in his charity.

Skillful Editing

The placement of Quenon's "Charity does not fall away" as motto to the whole program is an instance of the careful editing at work here. The interludes between speakers are both graceful and substantial—Ron Seitz reading his poem on Merton, Gethsemani Vespers or Compline, etc. Perhaps the most striking, though subtle, instance of how the interludes further the content is provided by the one following the Kelty interview. Kelty ends with reference to absence of a mother's love suffered by Merton. The interlude then leads directly into Vespers, recording the Gethsemani community as it chants, "For the mothers of all monks of this community, let us pray to the Lord," and continues with petitions for those various groups of persons who are (still) suffering from and in the world. It is precisely that suffering which Kelty cites as crucial to Merton's make-up. And it is the presence of that suffering, experienced and articulated for others, that lets Merton lead others beyond it to the awareness, cited by Quenon, of a loving God.

M. Basil Pennington. *Thomas Merton, My Brother: His Journey to Freedom, Compassion, and Final Integration*. Hyde Park, N.Y.: New City Press, 1996. 208 pages. Paper. Approximately \$15.

Reviewed by Raymond Wilkie

Fr. Basil Pennington is well-known to Merton scholars and International Thomas Merton Society members, as well as to many (including the reviewer) who have attended his popular lectures and