human conflicts even with the purest of intentions. No doubt, Merton must have realized that his vow of obedience and his vow of "conversation" were becoming dialectically polarized.

Such polarizations sometimes lead to negativity in outlook: Merton had little sympathy for modern technology. Thus he wrote on November 16, 1964: "When it comes to taking sides (regarding technology), I am perhaps with Ellul and Massignon rather than with Teilhard de Chardin." This may be a result of his greater familiarity with the shameless technology then being inflicted on human beings in Vietnam and with the sonic booms of SAC planes thundering over his hermitage. It seems that literary geniuses like Merton are, as a general rule, disqualified from insights into creative technology. (In this, Teilhard was a remarkable exception.)

What a pity. The technological structures that led to shame in Vietnam are still in place today. This situation can be transcended, not by damning technology but by dominating it. Symbolically and ironically, failure to master technology ended Merton's life of "conversation": he was electrocuted by a defective electric fan. If he had only learned the technology of household electricity, his literary gifts and mystic insights may still be active today in a two-way conversation with mankind.

The book was edited by Merton's friend Naomi Burton Stone, who was also a friend of Merton's abbot. Her professional and non-censorious editing is conducive to harmony. Sometimes, Merton must have felt the need to express his honest anger. For their part, the Cistercian censors would wish to edify many classes of readers. No doubt, a certain class of readers would prefer to be amused by disedifying items. But how much good will such amusement achieve? In such a delicate situation, the editor wisely decided to write a preface remarkable for its impeccable tact and taste.

Vicente Marasigan, S.J.


"Twenty-first anniversary today —
My thanks to you, Father, for deigning to share with this fragile being a part of Christ's priesthood.

Twenty-one years ago, the nature of this sharing and the activities connected with it were fairly clear in my mind.
Now these are not as clear. There is a hunger within for some clarity, sharpness, for greater definition . . .

Yes, Lord, you remind me gently that you are God, my Lord. And that I
will burst and explode if given just a bit of what you are. My weak fibers cannot really contain even the shadows of your truth and goodness.

But, Lord, the fact remains that the way you want this share of your Son’s priesthood to be carried through is still not clear.

I know, however, that this dimness is your gift to me — to make me feel the pressure of your guiding hand, the touch of your gentle gaze.

Lord, lead the way. I will make steps without seeing the terrain. You are there, here, Lord, everywhere. And you call — need I ask for more?"

This prayer, revealing a man of deep interiority and possessed with more than a touch of the poet, appears on page 87 of a remarkable, chronologically arranged collection of his writings. The year is 1980, nine years after Bienvenido Tadtud had become the first bishop of the prelature of Iligan and five years after an encounter with Pope Paul VI which changed the whole direction of his life. As he tells us (pp. 2-3) in the last thing he wrote shortly before his death in a plane crash in Baguio in June of 1987: "While in Rome I was called by the late Pope Paul VI. He wanted to be informed about the Muslim-Christian situation in the Prelature. He had already heard of the killings. I told him that the basis of the conflict was that Muslims and Christians were prejudiced against each other. In short, the Holy Father concluded, what was needed was reconciliation. He then asked me, "Who, in your opinion, ought to be the first to offer reconciliation?" I told the Holy Father that it would not be easy to invite the Christians to reconciliation and to the elimination of their prejudices against Muslims. So many Christians had tasted a goodly share of bitterness from their Muslim neighbors... Pope Paul VI understood that. But he added: "The Gospel challenge is not to remove our erroneous judgments of others but to overcome even those that are founded on real happenings." I could not but accept his challenge. But I made him understand that it would not be easy to encourage the Christians to offer reconciliation to the Muslims. The Pope nodded his head but immediately suggested that a community of Christians be formed whose sole aim would be reconciliation."

This conversation reveals much of the character of Paul VI, and shows him to have been a kindred spirit of Benny Tadtud (as he is fondly referred to throughout this book). The Pope did not explicitly suggest a separate prelature or the Muslim territory of Marawi. But such was the fruit of Benny’s prayer after his encounter with Paul VI. And that he read the mind of the Pope correctly seems clear from the fact that, from the time that the papers were sent to Rome requesting the establishment of the new prelature, only three months elapsed before the decree of erection was granted! Such speed, almost unknown in Rome, had only one explanation in Benny’s mind: "Things went very rapidly because the Holy Father Pope Paul VI himself wanted it."

Not everyone called Bishop Tadtud "Benny." A dear friend of mine, who
worked with him in Marawi for several years, calls him "Tatay" to this day. And she confirms the picture of Tatay which this book paints: he was a poet, an artist, a gifted photographer, a man of immense compassion who saw his vocation (and that of the Christians working with him in an area 99% Muslim) as one of powerlessness, weakness, vulnerability. Several of the quotations, masterfully edited and introduced by Michel de Gigord, MEP, make clear that this was Benny’s own understanding of his vocation and mission: not conversion achieved from a position of superiority and power, but the loving presence of one who is weak among the weak. Moreover, the title of the book captures very well the central element of Benny’s apostolic "method." It was to be dialogue — a "dialogue of faith and life." Over and over again he returns to this theme of dialogue — in conferences to prelature workers, in retreats, in lectures given in the Philippines and at international meetings on the Muslim apostolate. For genuine dialogue, as Benny saw it, there must be mutual respect. And since we Christians are, and are perceived to be, more powerful and economically successful (at least in this part of the world), the prime responsibility to show respect is ours. Even the term "Muslim apostolate" carries connotations of superiority and imposition for the Muslims. Rather, we must be good and loving listeners, who sincerely believe that we have something to receive and not merely to give in the exchange.

Benny’s vision was clear and he expressed it clearly and with eloquence. Why, then, did he say to the Lord on his twenty-first anniversary of ordination that "the way you want this share of your Son’s priesthood to be carried through is still not clear"? Perhaps because he found that few Christians, religious — few even of his fellow Bishops — shared or even understood his vision of dialogue from a position of powerlessness. Benny was a man of consummate charity, so one will look in vain in these writings for explicit criticisms of others. But it is not difficult to read between the lines — and to realize that he himself wondered why, if this was really God’s will for him, so few of the people he respected could resonate to his call. It also seemed clear to me (and my friend has confirmed the truth of my impression) that Benny himself was not an administrator. He was a visionary and a man committed to living his vision. And, as my friend has said, "His at-homeness with himself struck all of us who knew him, as did his gift for disturbing us in the way we went about our different ministries." But it was not his gift to organize others to implement his vision in a coherent and lasting way.

Will this vision, then, survive his sudden death? The book does not give us enough evidence to answer confidently. But I think I could guess what Benny himself would say: It will survive, not in ecclesiastical structures or institutions — after all, powerlessness and vulnerability, as Benny saw clearly, cannot be institutionalized — but in the hearts of people who have been captured by the same vision. Such are those who call him "Benny" or "Tatay." And there will be others. I myself scarcely knew him. But one of the fruits
of this book was to make me regret my loss. Father Michel has done the Church and the Muslim “apostolate” a great service by revealing the heart of Benny Tudtud to many like myself.

Thomas H. Green, S.J.