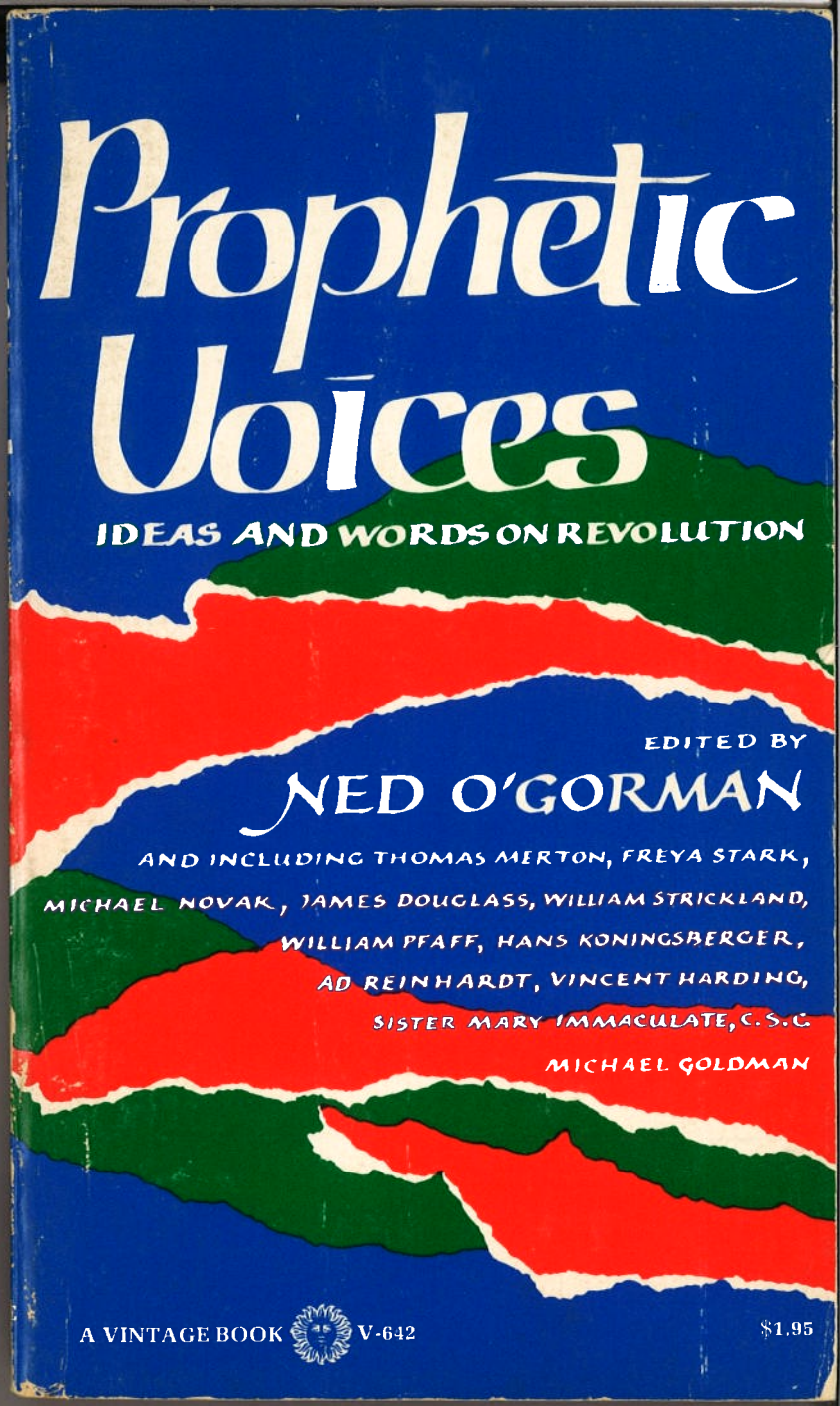
Prophetic Voices
IDEAS AND WORDS ON REVOLUTION
EDITED BY
NED O'GORMAN
AND INCLUDING THOMAS MERTON, FREYA STARK,
MICHAEL NOVAK, JAMES DOUGLASS, WILLIAM STRICKLAND,
WILLIAM PFAFF, HANS KONINGSBERGER,
AD REINHARDT, VINCENT HARDING,
SISTER MARY IMMACULATE, C.S.C.
MICHAEL GOLDMAN
A VINTAGE BOOK V-642
$1.95

PHILOSOPHY AND CURRENT EVENTS

Prophetic Voices

EDITED BY NED O'GORMAN

"An immensely exciting overview of rhythms and directions, in a time of dead stereotypes and dead ends. Only Ned O'Gorman could have assembled such friends, gracing such a book. It is his own life speaking here and now, what most of us hardly dare hope for—a struggle that leads somewhere, men living in the fervent discovery and service of one another."

—Daniel Berrigan, S.J.

"... the more than 20 contributors ... express their thoughts on peace, race, sex, law—and revolution—in literate offerings of prose and poetry.... they approach the world with new patterns of conception, with questions that bypass the incident of the present but study the fabric of today.... done with a grace and probity, often tinged with humor."

—Richard F. Shepard, *The New York Times*

"... these essays and 'definitions' add up to a disturbing book, one which may offend some readers' tastes yet create exciting ferment in others' sensibilities.... There is a quiet dynamite in this small book."

—*Library Journal*

"Conscence. That is the target of everything here. Without its goad, nothing changes. That is why it is important, urge[illegible]o consider the matters raised in this work."

—Robert R. Kirsch, *The Los Angeles Times*

Also available in a hardcover edition from Random House

COVER DESIGN BY GOLDA FISHBEIN

A VINTAGE BOOK

PRINTED IN U.S.A.

PROPHETIC VOICES

Brother David
Mount Saviour Monastery
Pine City, N. Y. 14871

We know by images. To have a clear idea means to have a clear mental "image." We say "I see!" when we mean "I understand clearly." But there are two distinct though interrelated paths: the discursive and the intuitive approaches; and to these two approaches correspond two kinds of mental images, two kinds of concepts. They differ in their origins.

The intuitive kind has simply grown up in our minds as we ourselves were growing from experience to experience. We are not likely to remember the first incident which sowed the concept in the mind. One day we "discover" it, already deeply rooted in our subconscious, its branches expanding in every direction.

When a word like "water" rings a bell for you, this is so because a thousand long-forgotten experiences have yielded the bell-metal for the founding of this con-

cept. Your first bath; the lawn-sprinkler on the freshly trimmed grass a dripping faucet throughout a long night; rain drumming on the canvas of a tent; the tang of the seashore; thundering breakers; the taste of salt-water; a birdbath; drift ice; the polluted canal; fountains at Salzburg, Rome or Versailles. Gushing, splashing, murmuring.

With every new experience of water this reality grows deeper in color and more profound in meaning. "Water" becomes for us transparent for a mysterious reality which it signifies and which it somehow contains. This happens before we are reflectively aware of it.

The other kind of mental image, the discursive concept, has not sprung up spontaneously, though we are easily deceived on this point. Our mind has constructed this concept as one constructs a schematic drawing on a board. We have arrived at it by a process of discursive reasoning, by analysis, comparison, elimination and composition, and what we have achieved is quite an accomplishment. The concept H_2O would be a typical example. It is useful to us in chemistry precisely because it has been stripped of all that gives fullness to the concept "water."

We need poetry and we need science, and, above all, men who speak both languages. Both concepts will serve us as long as we avoid the danger of confusing them and the danger of forgetting which of them is closer to reality. We are apt to forget that the scientific concept is a drastically impoverished one. The intuitive concept is a living tree, the other a piece of milled lumber.

The symbol is as contradictory as life. If we want manageable precision we must employ metaphor. Symbol is

the image itself with every restriction removed from intuition. We invent metaphor, but we discover symbol. Metaphor takes one thing and compares it with another. Ideally there is a one-to-one relationship. The elaborate metaphor of the olive tree in Romans 11:17–24 is an example. Israel is like an olive tree. Those who rejected the Gospel are like branches cut off. The gentiles who come to the faith are like wild olive branches grafted on. But St. Paul assures us that the original branches can be grafted back, and finally the imagery gets strained to the point where one wonders, why bother. All that evidently matters is the thought, and this thought outgrows the image like a costume bursting at the seams.

Unfortunately this is apt to happen; one might even imagine the inspired author commenting to his secretary, "I'm afraid we've killed that metaphor." But no one can kill a symbol.

Take the tree where it appears not as metaphor but as symbol in the Bible. It is there in the beginning, in the middle and in the end: as the tree of Knowledge in the Garden of Eden, as the Tree of Life in the Heavenly Jerusalem, and halfway between the two as the Rood Tree. And between these three pillars the Bible weaves a garland of imagery, from the apple tree to which the Bridegroom is likened in the Song of Songs to the tree of curse on which a criminal is to be hanged according to the Law. Every new reference adds new overtones to the unfolding theme of eating and knowing, of obedience and rebellion, life and death, blessing and curse, all symbolized by the tree. Here nothing can be translated without loss into a different imagery. It is simply held up before us like the wood of the cross on Good Friday: "Ecce . . ."—just look

and kneel; that is all. That is all we can do with a symbol, all we need to do.

While metaphor surrounds a garden patch of insight with a handsome hedge, symbol throws open a door of wide outlook and leads us into the great wilds of real life. Here, too, symbol and metaphor parallel intuition and discursive reasoning. Discursively we try to grasp truth, by intuition we lose ourselves in it. The two are mutually complementary like expansion and depth, the two dimensions of our inner growth. Only by retaining the tension between the horizontal and the vertical dimensions can we hope to gain access to truth.

The horizontal dimension is that of the objectively verifiable; the vertical one is the dimension of the subjectively experienced. One demands matter-of-fact dealing and skill, the other wonderment, reverence, awe. In the one we use, in the other we enjoy. In science our knowledge expands in quantity, in poetry our insight deepens in quality. The one, though it be immense, remains finite; the other is by its very essence infinite. As we expand we accumulate material—coded material, as it were—but we must go down into our depth to find the key to that code. Depth is the dimension of meaning.

To find meaning in the world presupposes that we take all things somehow as signs. The world has meaning because it points beyond itself; it comes to us as a word to which we ought to listen, it contains a message which we can understand. Poets and children are aware of this. They may misunderstand the message; but in this, at least, they are right—they realize spontaneously that it is a message. And they realize, too, that it is a message addressed to the whole man, to the heart, the core and center where intellect, will and emotions are still one. The

center where I am most truly myself and at the same time most deeply in communion with all other beings and with Mystery as the ground of all being—this is the heart. And the language of the heart is the language of symbol.

David Rast