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Trappist Monk Describes a Life of Visions and Near-Death Experiences

— *challenges Vatican view that visions came to saints of long ago but we don't have them now* —

MANCHESTER, Vermont — If you are religious, the odds are that you believe you will stand face-to-face with God on the day you die. But do you ever wonder whether that momentous encounter can occur while you are in good health and in the prime of an active life in the world?

During the years he was a Benedictine monk in Weston, Vermont in the 1960s, writer Tom Veitch formed life-long friendships with two contemplatives from the same monastic order as Thomas Merton. According to Veitch, both these men were visionaries living in profound communion with the Holy Spirit and with the reality beyond death.

On his deathbed, one of those men, whose religious name was Elias, agreed to discuss in depth the whole extent of his spiritual life, covering a period of more than fifty years. The result is a new book, *THE VISIONS OF ELIAS*, just published by Sky River Books of Manchester, Vermont.

Year after year, beginning in his early twenties, Elias found that the veil between this world and the next was thin to non-existent. Here, for the first time, he reveals to Tom how God came to him in dream and vision, moving him to abandon the world and take up the devotional life of a cloistered Trappist monk. Overwhelmed by these visions, he sought and found a mooring in conversations with his mentor, Dom Hugh McKiernan, Abbot of Holy Cross Abbey in Berryville, Virginia. And later, after both he and Father Hugh left the Trappists, they continued their spiritual alliance for many years, until Hugh's death in 1997.

With Hugh's help Elias came to terms not only with the intrusion of the Spirit in his own life, but also with the resistance of the official Church to that process.

He also gained understanding and perspective from the mystical teachings of the East as well as extensive involvement with the writings of C.G. Jung and with Jungian analysis.

Tom says, "Having been raised in the Catholic Church, I knew the more or less official view that visions came to saintly men and women long ago, but we don't have them now. And if we do have them, we are admonished to think little of them. We are even told to consider that they might be the work of the devil.... Elias convinced me otherwise."

Elias told Tom, "There were times when I tried to share these experiences and describe them to others. Apart from Hugh, the usual reaction was anger or a dismissive laugh, almost like they were threatened by my reports! One Catholic priest, a man I once respected, taunted me with the words 'What — do you think you have a direct pipeline to God?!' I found this bizarre, as if he hadn't read *The Gospel of John*, or understood that Jesus promised to open up just such access through the Holy Spirit."

Both as a critique of the spirituality of the Catholic Church and as a book of private revelation, THE VISIONS OF ELIAS is presented in a matter-of-fact way, leaving it to the reader to judge for themselves the reality and value of the experiences described.

Profound, but not a solemn book, THE VISIONS OF ELIAS is laced throughout with humor and a lightness of tone. As Elias said, he wasn't setting out to preach. He just wanted to tell his story for the record, for he knew that soon he would be going to the One who calls us all, and leaving this world forever.

After he left the Benedictines, Tom Veitch became a poet and literary novelist as well as the author of screenplays and graphic novels, including the award-winning and best-selling STAR WARS: DARK EMPIRE and TALES OF THE JEDI. He currently lives with his wife Martha in Vermont. This is his first non-fiction book.

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