

Aug. 9, 1962

To the Hon. Shinzo Hamai
Mayor of Hiroshima
Japan.

Most Honorable Mayor:

In a solemn and grave hour for humanity I address this letter to you and to your people. I thank you for the sincerity and courage with which you are, at this time, giving witness for peace and sanity. I wish to join my own thoughts, efforts and prayers to yours. There is no hope for mankind unless the truth prevails in us. We must purify our hearts and open them to the light of truth and mercy. You are giving us the example. May we follow you.

I speak to you as a most humble and unworthy brother, as a monk of a contemplative Order of the Catholic Church. As such, I have learned to have a very great love for Japan and for its spiritual traditions. There are in Japan several convents and one monastery of my religious Order. The Japanese Trappistine nuns are the glory of our Order. The finest and most fervent of our convents are those in Japan. May their whole hearted prayers for peace and for the spiritual and temporal prosperity of your nation be heard.

Men should use political instruments in behalf of truth, sanity, and international order. Unfortunately the blindness and madness of a society that is shaken to its very roots by the storms of passion and greed for power, make the fully effective use of political negotiation impossible. Men want to negotiate for peace, and strive to do so, but their fear is greater than their good will. They do not dare to take serious and bold initiatives for peace. Fear of losing face, fear of the propaganda consequences of apparent "weakness", make it impossible for them to do what is really courageous: to take firm steps towards world peace. When they take one step forward they immediately tell the whole world about it and then take four steps backward. We are all walking backward towards a precipice. We know the precipice is there, but we assert that we are all the while going forward. This is because the world in its madness is guided by military men, who are the blindest of the blind.

It is my conviction that the people of Hiroshima stand today as a symbol of the hopes of humanity. It is good that such a symbol should exist. The events of August 6th 1945 give you the most solemn right to be heard and respected by the whole world. But the world only pretends to respect your witness. In reality it cannot face the truth which you represent. But I wish to say on my own behalf and on behalf of my fellow monks and those who are like minded, that I never cease to face the truth which is symbolized in the names of Hiroshima, Nagasaki. Each day I pray humbly and with love for the victims of the atomic bombardments which took place there. All the holy spirits of those who lost their lives then, I regard as my dear and real friends. I express my fraternal and humble love for all the citizens of Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

Thomas Merton