

# CATHOLIC WORKER



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## Thomas Merton, Trappist

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By DOROTHY DAY

A year ago Thomas Merton was sending out his Advent-Christmas letter and telling of the death of three close friends by heart attacks. "Both were about my age," he wrote. "So if I suddenly follow their example I will be the last one to be surprised." He was fifty-three years old when he died. On Wednesday, December 11, we received a telegram from the abbot, telling of his death. We had no details of his dying from the New York Times that morning because we had an early edition which ran only his prepared obituary. It was from a later issue of the paper that we learned the details. I felt certain that it was indeed a heart attack which had caused him to fall against a standing electric fan in the monastery in Bangkok, which in turn fell upon him, burning him severely. He had arrived in Bangkok a week before to attend a meeting of Roman Catholic monks who had gathered to discuss monasticism in the Far East.

All of us at Tivoli and at St. Joseph's House of Hospitality on First Street in New York were shocked and saddened by the loss of this friend of the Catholic Worker and of the peace movement. He had been writing to us since the Fifties and we had published a great number of his articles. Ever since he wrote *Seven Story Mountain*, which was published in 1948 and made the best seller lists, he was kept busy by his abbot, writing more books and essays. The New York Times said of him that he was a writer of singular grace about the city of God and an essayist of penetrating originality on the City of Men. He had become a Catholic in 1938 and joined the Trappists at Gethsemani in 1941 and lived at Bardstown, Kentucky, first in the monastery and then as a hermit on the property. A few

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### Thank you, thank you!

"I am of so grateful a disposition," St. Teresa of Avila once said, "that I can be bought with a sardine." Much more than a sardine have we received these months. Happily working in our new headquarters at 36 East First Street, we rejoice in the central heating and hot water, and the fact of our all being under one roof for the first time since our old house was bulldozed out of existence by the city. For all who helped us make a down payment and accomplish all the repairs, we are deeply grateful and beg God's blessings on them. And to all those who have answered our appeal for help to make some beginning of paying off our bills which accumulated while we were using all the money that came in for repairs, we beg God to outdo them in generosity a hundredfold. If you have received but an inadequate note of acknowledgment, please excuse us—the work is piled high and half the house is down with 'flu, being more comfortably sick than they would have been six months ago, thanks to the new place. Deo gratias.



## 36 East First

By JACK COOK

To Dan Kelly,  
Allenwood Prison Farm,  
Allenwood, Pennsylvania

Dear Dan:

Remember the classic *faux pas* I made when last I used this column as a private-public letter to Jim Wilson, who was then where you are now: in Allenwood Prison? I addressed him in the salutation as "Dead Jim," not "Dear Jim"; and to this day we do not know whether the original error was in my copy (which is missing) or simply a fantastic fluke on the part of the printer.

Perhaps, overzealous in my effort to identify with Jim in prison, I subconsciously gave a name to his state of mind at the time. I hope and trust that it is not your state of mind. I prefer to regard such events as that painfully poignant salutation as metaphysical mysteries and leave it at that. A week or so ago, shortly before 10 o'clock when we serve our soup, bread, and tea, it was discovered that we had no tea.

Being short of help that day, we could not send anyone out for some, so we reluctantly took the cups from the tables. At that moment the nuns who regularly donate bread and cake to us arrived, and, you guessed it, in one of the cartons was a pound and a half of excellent tea.

And of our soupline let it be said, as I still maintain about the old Latin Mass, that it is a work of art from beginning to end. There is something of the artist (as Pat May says) in John McMullen, who now is in charge of the soup thing, as he orchestrates pande-

monium every morning to an appreciative audience. To those too timid to ask for seconds, he says: "Let me put a head on that bowl of soup." Wong, stern and brusque, is effective counterpoint, and Fred Lindsey takes up the theme downstairs, where he entertains the troops with his burlesque routines.

There are other themes, of course: Louis Prinz, who along with Italian Mike, Brother John, Jimmy the Indian, and others, regularly works on the second floor, told me he knows more than a few Bowery men who come in not for soup alone but to meditate in those intervals of silence following raucous discord. And the curtain rises and falls on the lilting greeting and farewell of our Scottish Mary Gallagan.

### Of Prisoners

I am rather glad, I must admit, that my sentencing and time (mid-January; probably at Allenwood) postdate the upcoming "action" on the part of the ambitious Peace Movement at Allenwood on the 20th of December. I understand it is to be another "celebration of life" thing, complete with Joan Baez and Freedom songs.

Besides making prison officials uptight, the probable consequence more rigid routines, there are other objections. I would delight, were I in prison, to be sung to and made to feel good; but I would be depressed as hell, were I in prison, to be singled out, sung to, and made to feel holy.

So blessed, how would I face this other guy (or he, me) who's in for un-

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## Along the Nisqually

By ROBERT D. CASEY

The fall fishing season here in the State of Washington opened with an almost inevitable confrontation between the Indian tribes, who were exercising their Treaty rights to earn a living by fishing their rivers, and the State, which is attempting to regulate this troublesome ethnic minority out of existence by destroying their economic basis of survival. Although the Indians catch only five per cent of the annual take of salmon, most of the recently enacted legislation, all in the name of "conservation," seems to be aimed at them and not at the commercial fishing interests, which maintain expensive, efficient, and well paid lobbies in the corridors of the State legislature—playing a game the Indians don't even know the name of.

A new, and potentially dangerous, development is taking place in the ranks of the Indian youths serving in the armed forces. (They are disproportionately represented there, because very few Indian lads are deferred for any reason. During World War II, the Indians used to say that "if you can see lightning and hear thunder, you're in.") Some of the young braves, home on furlough from the killing in Vietnam, have determined not to go back to the war in Asia until they have finished fighting for the rights of their own people here at home.

Here are excerpts from a public declaration made on October 13th by P.F.C. Sidney Mills, a Yakima and Cherokee Indian who served in the Army for two years and four months and was critically wounded in combat in Vietnam:

My first obligation lies with the Indian people, fighting for their lawful treaty rights . . . and in serving them, in this fight, in any way possible. The defense of the Indian people, and their chosen way of life . . . is more compelling than any duty to the U.S. military. I renounce, and no longer consider myself under, the authority and the jurisdiction of the United States Army.

I have served the U.S. in a less compelling struggle in Vietnam and will not be restricted from doing less for my own people within the United States . . . I have given enough to the U.S. Army and now choose to serve my people. My decision is further influenced by the fact that we have already buried Indian fishermen, returned dead from Vietnam, while other Indian fishermen live here without protection and under steady attack from the power processes of this nation and the States of Washington and Oregon.

I will not be among those who draw pride from a past in which I had no part, nor from a proud heritage I will not uphold. We must give of ourselves today—and I for one will not be content to have women and children fighting in my stead. At least, I will be among them—at least, they will not be alone.

After Sidney Mills made his decision to fight for justice along the banks

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# Thomas Merton, Trappist

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months ago he wrote us that he was asked by his abbot to attend a series of meetings with monks of the Eastern religions and to visit Trappist monasteries in the Far East. He regarded this journey as a great opportunity to increase his study and contribute to his writings about the mystical life of East and West. His books can be obtained at any library and indeed in drug stores and bus stations and wherever paperbacks are sold.

Today I heard the comment made by one of a group of people who were helping mail out the November issue of the *Catholic Worker* that Merton intended to leave his monastery and was very discontented at the way the Trappist monasteries were run.

I would like to reprint a few quotations from some of his letters to me, and these quotations will serve to answer this kind of gossip and also serve as a Christmas greeting to us all.

"I am trying to get all the material I have done on peace together in a book. Do please pray that the obstacles to this and the various difficulties may smooth themselves out, by God's will. I think at any rate the picture is rounding out and I am getting clear on what to say."

## A Month Later

"Yesterday I mailed you a copy of the book which is not to be published: **Peace in the Post-Christian era.** My superiors, having been alerted by zealous individuals in this country, felt that I was 'going too far' and getting away from the contemplative vocation into 'dangerous ground,' etc. etc. The book has not even been censored, just forbidden. I accept this with good will and I think humor, because there is a lot of irony in it after all."

"... Since I am not writing anything about war anymore, I have gone back to the Fathers, to Cassiodorus, Cyprian, Tertullian, etc. I will try to type out bits of things they say that could be used in the *CW* here and there and will send them along. I will probably do a few translations, and maybe write some prayers. I have to do a book on Cassian some time, and thanks again for the translation you sent. We always use it."

"It is no use speculating too much about the world situation, but it is certainly a very risky one. The whole world is under judgement and one feels it keenly. Without saying that I think something is going to happen, I think I can say reasonably that there is just no reason for it not to happen. I think the evil in us all has reached the point of overflowing. May the Holy Spirit give us compunction and inner truth and humility and love, that we may be a leaven in this world, and that we may help and bring light to those who need it most; and the Lord alone knows who they are, for the need of all is desperate."

## About Leaving the Trappists

"... I know that I cannot really expect them (some pacifist friends) to take the slightest interest in the pecu-

liar problem I have, trying to live an authentic life of solitude (which I certainly think will do more for the peace movement than anything I write)... X. Y., by the way, in a long letter argued that my whole monastic life was a pure evasion, that I ought to be back in the world leading a life of authentic involvement like himself, etc., etc. Don't worry, I have heard enough of that to know what I think of it. I am more determined than ever on my present course, in spite of what they may think about it. In fact their opposition is to me another reason to continue obeying God rather than man...

"I honestly realize that my function now is not to try to be a voice in the peace movement. I feel that such an attempt would be clearly false on my part, playing a role God does not now ask of me (unless in some particular situation it becomes evident that He does require me to speak)... It is more and more clear to me that if I pretended to keep up with politics here and tried to utter profound judgments from my solitude I would be deceiving myself and perhaps others... My solitude has to be completely genuine, otherwise what use is it?... I have had enough experience in 24 years of monastic life to know that even if certain measures of superiors may be a little unfair, one never loses anything by obeying, quite the contrary. And God sometimes reserves special gifts and an extra fruitfulness for us, something we could not have gained without this sacrifice... However, Superiors will have to learn by experience that the Decree on Religious, in the Council, meant what it said; that subjects are to be trusted more and given more latitude in important matters. Maybe some will learn the hard way... the religious should obey and trust God. There is no better way. If there were our Lord would have shown it to us. His example led to the Cross."

## A Christmas Greeting

Reading over again Thomas Merton's last year's Christmas letter, sent to all his friends, "The times are difficult. They call for courage and faith. Faith is in the end a lonely virtue. Lonely especially where a deeply authentic community of love is not an accomplished fact, but a job to be begun over and over; I am not referring to Gethsemane, where there is a respectable amount of love, but to all Christian communities in general. Love is not something we get from Mother Church as a child gets milk from the breast; it also has to be given. We don't get any love if we don't give any... Christmas then is not just a sweet regression to breast feeding and infancy. It is a serious and sometimes difficult feast. Difficult especially if for psychological reasons we fail to grasp the indestructible kernel of Hope that is in it. If we are just looking for a little consolation we may be disappointed. Let us pray for one another, love one another in truth, in the sobriety of earnest Christian hope, for hope, says Paul, does not deceive."