THOMAS MERTON

Witness to Freedom

LETTERS IN TIMES OF CRISIS

SELECTED AND EDITED BY WILLIAM H. SHANNON

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Introduction

To defend one's faith is to defend one's freedom, and at least implicitly the freedom of everyone else.
CONJECTURES OF A GUILTY BYSTANDER

Only in the Lord's service is there true freedom, as the prophets would tell us. This is still the clear experience of the Jews, as it ought to be of the Christians, except that we were too sure of our freedom and too sure we could never alienate it. Alas, for hundreds of years we have disregarded the fact that we are the children of God and now the whole world is reaping the consequences. If only Christians had valued the freedom of the children of God that was given them. They preferred safety and the Grand Inquisitor.
TO ERICH FROMM

Truth is the solid foundation of freedom, and truth only.
TO ARTHUR HAYS SULZBERGER

There is a sense of joy and relief in bringing to a close the publication of the five volumes of the Letters of Thomas Merton. There has been the joy of being in touch with Merton's many correspondents, at times through personal contact and at others through the intimate sharing that comes from reading so many warmly personal letters. There was joy in experiencing the friendships that Merton made and added joy in making some of those friendships mine also. The task of acting as general editor—editing the first volume myself and then being closely involved in the editing of the next three—has been a deeply enriching experience and a source of personal growth for me.

It all started on July 14, 1982, at a luncheon meeting with Robert Giroux, James Laughlin, and Anne McCormick at the Chelsea Place Restaurant on Eighth Avenue in New York. They asked me, on behalf of all the members of the Merton Legacy Trust, to take on the job of general editor of the Letters of Thomas Merton. We had no idea at that point how many volumes would result. I am grateful to Dr. Robert E. Daggy, Brother Patrick Hart, and Dr. Christine M. Bochen (who edited Volumes

II, III, and IV, respectively) for their excellent help in moving this project toward completion. At the same time there is a sense of wholesome relief that, after more than ten years of work on the letters, the project is reaching a successful and fruitful outcome.

I have entitled this volume *Witness to Freedom*. I believe it to be an appropriate title—one way of summing up Merton's life. He knew the importance of freedom; he knew also, perhaps most particularly in himself, the barriers that prevent freedom from being a living reality in a person's life. Merton's notion of what freedom meant underwent radical change. Roughly, I would designate three stages in the story of his growth to freedom. For the first half of his life, it meant largely the removal of restraints that prevented him from doing what he wanted to do (though it should perhaps be added that during this period of his life he was never quite sure what he wanted to do).

At the midpoint of his life—specifically the evening in 1941 when he arrived at the Abbey of Our Lady of Gethsemani in Kentucky to begin life as a monk—he reached stage two in his journey to freedom. When he was received by the brother at the gatehouse, he tells us: "Brother Matthew locked the gate behind me and I was enclosed in the four walls of my new freedom" (*SSM*, p. 372). A curious way of looking at freedom: a locked gate and a four-wall enclosure! At this stage Merton seemed to look outwardly for freedom—that is, he looked to the monastic rule and to the decisions of his superiors as a mediated way of exercising his freedom. Perhaps this was a necessary stage for him as he first entered the monastery. He had experienced in his own life the disaster that unrestrained freedom could bring, and he now saw the need of discipline and asceticism. Following the rule and obeying the directives of his superiors opened the way to a freedom much more real than the unbridled freedom of his youth.

But Thomas Merton's life was anything but static. As he grew in the monastic life and in the living of the contemplative life, his understanding of freedom underwent drastic modifications. At this third stage he saw freedom as an inner reality, guided much more from within than from without. In this stage the will of God presses down on one's freedom with an immediacy that at times can be frightening. Encountering God can mean the discovery of our deepest freedom. Merton writes: "Our encounter with God, our response to God's word is the drawing forth and calling out of our deepest freedom, our true identity" (*CWA*, p. 344). To be free and to experience one's true identity means to rid one's life of the illusions and fictions we so often live by: living in the real world and not in a world constructed by our own fantasies or expectations. It means taking responsibility for one's own life: standing on one's own feet, making one's own decisions of conscience. This was the kind of freedom that Merton came to see as the only authentic way of living the monastic life and, indeed, the Christian life. To what degree he achieved it is something

difficult, perhaps impossible, for us to judge. But that he never ceased to strive for it is, to my mind, the chief biographical fact about Thomas Merton.

If the content of these letters is about freedom, the context in which he wrote them was one of struggle. The times called for critique and reappraisal. The institutional structures of monastic life, Roman Catholicism, and American life were coming under close scrutiny. The Western world saw its identity being threatened by the cultural inroads of the great civilizations of the East.

Merton was facing his own struggles too. To give but one example, an ongoing struggle of his life was dealing with the question: How does one balance an authentic understanding of freedom with a monk's commitment to obedience? Part III of this volume includes letters I have labeled "Vocation Crisis: 1959–1960." These letters tell the story of an important phase of the freedom-obedience struggle in Merton's life. They witness to the delicate balance he was generally able—though not always without personal anguish—to achieve in his life's journey to the place of perfect freedom.

This fact—that Merton lived in an era of struggle, both personal and societal—suggested the subtitle of this book, "Letters in Times of Crisis." Merton readers will remember that in *Seeds of Destruction* he used a similar (though not identical) title for a group of letters he published in that volume, describing them as "Letters in a Time of Crisis." These were the very first letters of Merton's to be published commercially. That the last volume of his published letters should recall that title seems to be singularly appropriate.

It should be clear that Thomas Merton was not content simply to seek freedom in his own life. As the monastic walls began to move out and he found himself in contact with more and more people outside those walls, he accepted the responsibility of helping others to move along the way of true freedom. He chose to place his own freedom at the service of the freedom of others. He became freedom's witness.

From his monastic vantage point, he could see a good deal of unfreedom in the world and yet at the same time wondrous resources of good will and generous love. In an article written in 1966 for *Commonweal*, he describes himself:

This is simply the voice of a self-questioning human person who, like all his brothers [and sisters] struggles to cope with turbulent, mysterious, demanding, exciting, frustrating, confused existence, in which almost nothing is really predictable, in which most definitions, explanations and justifications become incredible even before they are uttered, in which people suffer together and are sometimes utterly beautiful, at other times impossibly pathetic. In which there is much that is frightening, in which almost everything public is patently phony, and in which there is at

the same time an immense ground of personal authenticity that is right there and so obvious that no one can talk about it and most cannot even believe that it is there. [*CWA*, p. 160.]

"In which almost everything public is patently phony"—this meant many things to Merton. It meant the world of communication and advertising—communication which regularly slanted the truth or distorted it, advertising that created false needs in people and prevented them from seeing clearly what was for their good. It meant technology which, however much good it might do for people (and he readily acknowledged that good), was all too frequently soiled by the all-consuming push for profit and efficiency, achieved so often at the expense of people's true humanity. It meant the military-industrial complex that sought profit in producing arms and was able to live with an attitude of callous indifference toward the destruction of human lives which their products were meant to accomplish.

One of the manifestations of unfreedom that haunted Merton much of his life, but especially in the 1960s, was the terrible specter of war. War destroys the freedom of its victims and blinds the freedom of its "victors." Merton wrote a great deal about the evils of war and the obligation of all people of good will to do everything possible to make war a thing of the past. He wrote articles in such journals as *The Catholic Worker*, *Commonweal*, *Jubilee*, and *Blackfriars*. In April 1962 he was forbidden by the highest authority in the Cistercian Order to publish on the topic of war and peace. He obeyed the prohibition against *publishing*, but continued circulating mimeographed articles through his wide network of friends. The most famous of these mimeographs was, without a doubt, a selection he made of his own letters and issued under the title *The Cold War Letters*. These letters form a major part of this volume.

It may seem an anachronism, now that the Berlin Wall is down and the Soviet Union no longer exists, to publish Merton's Cold War Letters. After all, the "Cold War," as the term was first used by Walter Lippmann in 1947, meant the confrontation between the two superpowers: the U.S.A. and the U.S.S.R. Yet even though that confrontation is a thing of the past, it would be wrong to say that our present state is one of peace. The threat of war continues, even though the protagonists, and also the issues, are less clearly defined. Nuclear missiles still exist in abundance and new types of "conventional" weapons with terribly destructive power have been produced and their destructiveness was demonstrated in the Persian Gulf War. National rivalries, economic factors, ethnic and religious antagonisms have produced a worldwide instability that could at any moment break into hot war (something, for instance, that at this writing is going on in what was once Yugoslavia). Hence, though the term may have taken on a different meaning, our world is still in a situation, not of true peace, but of Cold War. Many of the things Merton had to

say in the 1960s are equally applicable to the world situation that now exists. That is why I believe that Merton's Cold War Letters still say important things that we need to hear.

For Thomas Merton freedom was grounded in his religious faith. "To defend one's faith is to defend one's freedom, and at least implicitly the freedom of everyone else" (*CGB*, p. 88). And what did that freedom amount to? It is a freedom from all those forces from the outside that would try to prevent anyone from saying his or her own "yes" or "no." This ability to say a personal "yes" or "no"—that does not echo the "yes" or "no" of state, party, corporation, institution, or system—is the bedrock of authentic freedom. Merton believed that it was this kind of freedom that helped to define true art and authentic writing. It was this kind of freedom that was the goal of all major religions. His own Church, he felt, was meant to be a center of freedom. All her laws and all the various ways in which she exercised her authority must be subordinate to the Holy Spirit and the freedom which is the Spirit's gift to all. He recognized that the Church does not look like that to many who are outside her. They believe that the Church acts on the principle of authority, not of freedom. But it is in Christ and in His Spirit that true freedom is found; and the Church is, first and foremost, not simply an institution, but Christ's Body, His people living by His Spirit. (See *CGB*, p. 89.)

Among the letters in this volume are many to well-known persons, such as the artist and printer Victor Hammer; the ecologist Rachel Carson; his dear friend and literary agent Naomi Burton Stone; his fellow poet and teacher Mark Van Doren; his Abbot, Dom James Fox; the fellow Trappist writer who was his contemporary at Gethsemani, Fr. Raymond Flanagan; the distinguished French Arabic scholar Louis Massignon; the Canadian philosopher Leslie Dewart; and a host of others. There is even an open letter to the American hierarchy on the issue of war.

But there are also quite a number of letters to little-known persons, even some unidentified. The inclusion of these letters would, I think, have pleased Thomas Merton. He very much believed in the importance of ordinary people.

In terms of the issues discussed, the letters have been arranged around the following categories (though with the realization that Merton's letters are like a river frequently overflowing its banks, which is to say that few of them can be restricted to a single issue): art and freedom; war and freedom; Merton's life and works; Merton's thoughts about some aspects of religion and religious dialogue. These groupings make up the four parts of this book. The leaven that informs them all, implicitly or explicitly, is always freedom. Thus, for instance, in reference to Part IV, one cannot understand Judaism, Islam, Eastern religions, and Christianity in its various manifestations except in terms of their being, at an ultimate level (which unhappily they do not always reach), guarantors of human freedom.

Merton's life was a struggle for freedom and his writings were an articulation of that struggle. It was chiefly in the way he lived and in what he wrote that he was a living witness to freedom, perhaps one of the great witnesses of our century.

WILLIAM H. SHANNON
Editor

ABBREVIATIONS FOR MERTON WRITINGS CITED IN TEXT

AJ	*The Asian Journal*
CT	*The Courage for Truth*
CGB	*Conjectures of a Guilty Bystander*
CP	*Collected Poems*
CWA	*Contemplation in a World of Action*
HGL	*The Hidden Ground of Love*
RJ	*The Road to Joy*
SC	*The School of Charity*
SJ	*The Sign of Jonas*
SSM	*The Seven Storey Mountain*
WS	*The Waters of Siloe*

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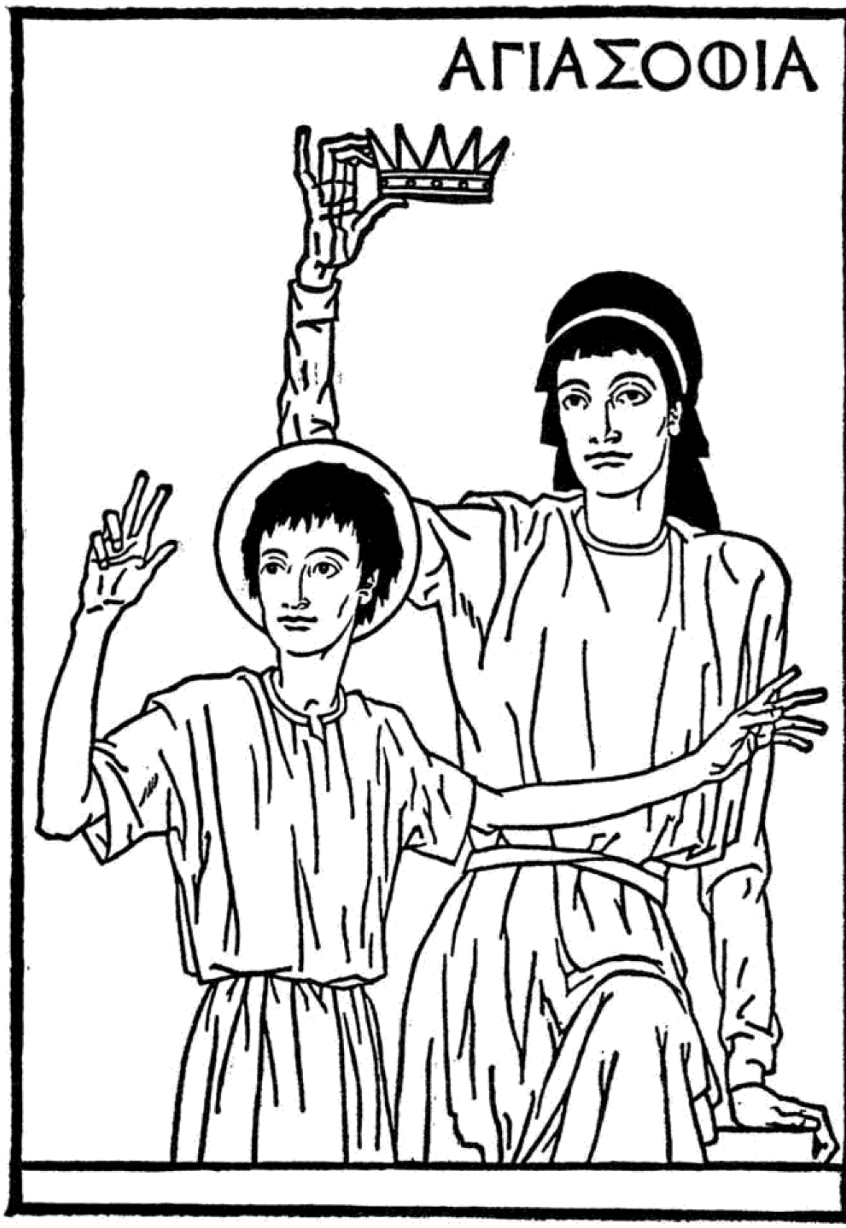
I.
Art and Freedom

It is the greatest glory of Christian art that it expresses the freedom of the children of God.

PREFACE TO WILLIAM CONGDON'S
In My Disc of Gold



Copy of an unfinished engraving by Victor Hammer, used as an illustration in the second limited edition of Hagia Sophia. *Printed with the permission of Carolyn Reading Hammer*

To Victor Hammer

Born in Vienna on December 9, 1882, Victor Hammer was brought up in the old quarter of the city among modest artisans. At the age of sixteen he entered the Vienna Academy of Fine Arts and learned to support himself by drawing and painting. An inveterate traveler, he visited many places in Europe and before he had reached the age of forty had gone twice to the United States. He became famous as a typographer who formulated principles that others were to follow; he was also adept in bookbinding and calligraphy.

With Hitler's rise to power and the spread of Nazism to Austria, Hammer gave up his position as professor of art at the Academy of Fine Arts in Vienna and came to the United States. In 1939 he accepted the position of professor of art at Wells College in Aurora-on-Cayuga, New York, where he taught lettering, drawing, and painting and, with his son Jacob, founded the Wells College Press and the Hammer Press. In 1948 he retired from Wells College to become artist-in-residence at Transylvania College in Lexington, Kentucky. He and his wife, Carolyn, whom he married in 1955, lived in a historical residence in Gratz Park in Lexington. One of his presses was brought from Florence and became the King Library Press. Under the imprint he had used in Italy, Stamperia del Santuccio, he printed special limited editions of several of Merton's books. On one of his visits to the Hammers, Merton saw a triptych that Victor had painted. The central panel showed a woman and a young boy standing in front of her; the woman was putting a crown on the child's head and Merton asked who the woman was. Hammer answered that he had begun to paint a madonna and child, but it had not turned out as he expected and he no longer knew who the woman was. Merton said, "I know who she is. I have always known her. She is Hagia Sophia."

On May 2, 1959, Hammer wrote to Merton asking him to come bless the triptych and also to explain in more detail what he had said about Hagia Sophia. Merton did so in the following letter. The contents of this letter later grew into

the text of his long poem, "Hagia Sophia," printed by Hammer in a limited edition; it was also published in Emblems of a Season of Fury *and appears in* Collected Poems.

May 14, 1959

I have not rushed to reply to your letter—first, because I have been a little busy, and second, because it is most difficult to write anything that really makes sense about this most mysterious reality in the mystery of God—Hagia Sophia [Holy Wisdom].

The first thing to be said, of course, is that Hagia Sophia is God Himself. God is not only a Father but a Mother. He is both at the same time, and it is the "feminine aspect" or "feminine principle" in the divinity that is the Hagia Sophia. But of course as soon as you say this the whole thing becomes misleading: a division of an "abstract" divinity into two abstract principles. Nevertheless, to ignore this distinction is to lose touch with the fullness of God. This is a very ancient intuition of reality which goes back to the oldest Oriental thought. (There is something about it in Carolyn's wonderful book *Peaks and Lamas* [written by Marco Pallis], incidentally.) For the "masculine-feminine" relationship is basic in *all* reality—simply because all reality mirrors the reality of God.

In its most primitive aspect, Hagia Sophia is the dark, nameless *Ousia* [Being] of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost, the incomprehensible, "primordial" darkness which is infinite light. The Three Divine Persons, each at the same time, are Sophia and manifest her. But where the Sophia of your picture comes in is this: the wisdom of God, "reaching from end to end mightily" is also the Tao, the nameless pivot of all being and nature, the center and meaning of all, that which is the smallest and poorest and most humble in all: the "feminine child" playing before God the Creator in His universe, "playing before Him at all times, playing in the world" (Proverbs 8). (This is the Epistle of the Feast of the Immaculate Conception.) This feminine principle in the universe is the inexhaustible source of creative realizations of the Father's glory in the world and is in fact the manifestation of His glory. Pushing it further, Sophia in ourselves is the *mercy* of God, the tenderness which by the infinitely mysterious power of pardon turns the darkness of our sins into the light of God's love.

Hence, Sophia is the feminine, dark, yielding, tender counterpart of the power, justice, creative dynamism of the Father.

Now the Blessed Virgin is the one created being who in herself realizes perfectly all that is hidden in Sophia. She is a kind of personal manifestation of Sophia. She crowns the Second Person of the Trinity with His human nature (with what is weak, able to suffer, able to be defeated) and sends Him forth with His mission of inexpressible mercy, to die for man on the Cross, and this death, followed by the Resurrection, is the greatest expression of the "manifold wisdom of God" which unites

us all in the mystery of Christ—the Church. Finally, it is the Church herself, properly understood as the great manifestation of the mercy of God, who is the revelation of Sophia in the sight of the angels.

The key to the whole thing is, of course, *mercy and love.* In the sense that God is Love, is Mercy, is Humility, is Hiddenness, He shows Himself to us within ourselves as our own poverty, our own nothingness (which Christ took upon Himself, ordained for this by the Incarnation in the womb of the Virgin) (the crowning in your picture), and if we receive the humility of God into our hearts, we become able to accept and embrace and love this very poverty, which is Himself and His Sophia. And then the darkness of Wisdom becomes to us inexpressible light. We pass through the center of our own nothingness into the light of God.

I wrote that first page without keeping a carbon, but I am getting someone to copy it because I am going to want to know what I said. I say these things and forget them, and then someone refers to them again and I can no longer remember what is being talked about. I cannot remember what it was I said when I was there in Lexington and we were looking at the triptych.

The beauty of all creation is a reflection of Sophia living and hidden in creation. But it is only our reflection. And the misleading thing about beauty, created beauty, is that we expect Sophia to be simply a more intense and more perfect and more brilliant, unspoiled, spiritual revelation of the same beauty. Whereas to arrive at her beauty we must pass through an apparent negation of created beauty, and to reach her light we must realize that in comparison with created light it is a darkness. But this is only because created beauty and light are ugliness and darkness compared with her. Again the whole thing is in the question of mercy, which cuts across the divisions and passes beyond every philosophical and religious ideal. For Sophia is not an ideal, not an abstraction, but the highest reality, and the highest reality must manifest herself to us not only in power but also in poverty, otherwise we never see it. Sophia is the Lady Poverty to whom St. Francis was married. And of course she dwelt with the Desert Fathers in their solitude, for it was she who brought them there and she whom they knew there. It was with her that they conversed all the time in their silence.

I wish I had a fuller remembrance of your pictures. I just remember the general idea. The story you tell of its growth is very interesting and revealing and I am sure Hagia Sophia herself was guiding you in the process, for it is she who guides all true artists, and without her they are nothing.

When [Ad] Reinhardt [the painter, Merton's classmate] was here he was discussing art too. His approach is very austere and ascetic. It is a kind of exaggerated reticence, a kind of fear of self expression. All his paintings are very formal and black. I certainly do not think he is a quack like so many others; on the contrary, he is in strong reaction against them.

I think you and he would be in fundamental agreement. It is a pity he was not able to get over there. He is certainly not a brilliant success (like so many of the others who are making fortunes with their stuff).

Now J. Laughlin, whom you know, is coming down in June. He wants very much to see you, and will write to you about it. My novice, who was in the hospital, came out but is going back, and it is possible that perhaps it might be necessary for me to make one trip more. I do not know what the future will bring, but until I know more about it let us wait and expect the possibility at any rate. If nothing comes up, then we could plan on you both coming over here later in June. I could write about that. I think often of the Desert Fathers, and the work [is] progressing. And how is the broadside? Maybe we could make a little broadsheet on Sophia, with the material begun here???

I am really enjoying *Peaks and Lamas*, and also the Athos book has been very fine—and the Hesiod. When you have thought about this material on Sophia, perhaps we could make a further step toward thinking of a title. I am so happy to be involved in what is clearly a very significant work, spiritually as well as artistically.

Thank you for the photostats from the [Catholic] Encyclopedia [on Wisdom]. I looked them over, and they just begin to touch on the mysterious doctrine. Carolyn should try to get for the Library a book by Sergius Bolgakov, called *The Wisdom of God*, published in London in the thirties. It would cover very well the Sophia theme. I have notes on it, but the book is very technical in its way.

On January 21, 1962, Hammer wrote to Merton and asked him what he thought "brainwashing" meant. How, he asked, can we escape it with all the newspapers and other means of communication?

[*Cold War Letter 24b*] c. January 25, 1962

As for brainwashing, the term is used very loosely about almost anything. Strict technical brainwashing is an artificially induced "conversion," brought about by completely isolating a person emotionally and spiritually, undermining his whole sense of identity, and then "rescuing" him from this state of near-collapse by drawing him over into a new sense of community with his persecutors, now his rescuers, who "restore" his identity by admitting [him] into their midst as an approved and docile instrument. Henceforth he does what they want him to do and likes it, indeed finds a certain satisfaction in this, and even regards his old life as shameful and inferior.

In the loose sense, any mass man is a "brainwashed" man. He has lost his identity or never had one in the first place, and he seeks security, hope, a sense of identity in his immersion in the pressures and prejudices of a majority, speaking through TV, newspapers, etc. Having no real power or meaning in himself, he seeks all in identification with a pre-

sumably all-powerful all-wise collectivity. Whatever the collectivity does is right, infallible, perfect. Anything approved by it becomes legitimate and even noble. The worst crimes are virtues when backed up by the all-powerful collectivity. All that matters is to be part of the great, loud mass.

It seems to me that the great effort of conscience that remains for modern man is to resist this kind of annihilating pressure, this defection, in every possible way. The temptation comes unfortunately from very many angles, even seemingly good sources. The Cold War is the deadly influence that is leading Western man to brainwash himself.

When the process is completed there will be nothing left but the hot war or the decline into totalitarian blindness and inertia, which also spells hot war in the end. The prospects are very dark, aren't they? Yet I think that perhaps some providential accident may happen that will wake everyone up. Some kind of plague of radiation, perhaps, something unexpected and unforeseen that will force people to their senses. But can we say we have done anything to deserve this? I hardly think so. Fortunately, if we only get what we deserved, we would never have very much of anything good. God is not simply just, He is also and above all merciful. I wish that this had not been so thoroughly forgotten . . .

The French situation is very disturbing indeed. Much evil can come of this. Everyone expects De Gaulle to get it this year sometime, and I wonder how long he can survive. He has been a good man in many ways, yet perhaps mistakenly messianic too. But what could any reasonable human being [have] done with Algeria? If he goes, then France goes too. And this may be the spark that will finally ignite everything. The next few months will tell us a thing or two. And the next three years, or four: well, to call them fateful is putting it so mildly as to be ridiculous.

I wonder if there is going to be much left of the Western world by 1984 to fulfill George Orwell's prophecies.

Meanwhile, we have only to be what we are and to retain the spirit and civilization which we were blessed with, and to keep as human as we can.

[*Cold War Letter 71*] May 1962

More and more I see that it is not the moral principles which are at stake but, more radically, the whole outlook of modern man, at least in America, and the basic assumptions which tend to guide his thought, if it can be called thought. We are living in an absurd dream, and a very bad one. And it is the fruit of all sorts of things we ought not to have done. But the whole world is in turmoil, spiritually, morally, socially. We are sitting on a thin crust above an immense lake of molten lava that is stirring and getting ready to erupt. Nothing will stop this eruption. But at least we can refrain from setting off bombs that will start it in some far worse way than it normally would.

November 9, 1963

I shudder at the thought of attempting a long didactic poem on art. Yet who knows, someday it may happen. I generally end up doing what I never expected to do, and I suppose that is a very good thing. However, I am firmly resolved to do anything but this at the moment.

Of course, one could approach the subject of art as a way of "knowing" and seeing. You sometimes cannot see a thing at all unless you take pains to make something like it. And yet not like it. Nothing gets to be known without being changed in the process.

As to saying "What is art?," well, I don't think there is much chance of making any sense out of the question if one is looking for a pure essence. On the other hand, the question is not without *meaning*. It is a matter of communication, not of discovery: not of defining the thing and getting command over it, but of clarifying one's own concepts and conveying what one means, or does not mean.

After all, one has to be able to say that abstract expressionism is *not* art, and I think that clarifies most of what needs to be said about it, both for and against. That is precisely what is "for" it: that it is not art, though it seems to be. I know this statement is scandalous, and I think the ambiguities are bad ones in the long run (it should not pretend to be art, which in fact it does). I do not think that throwing paint on canvas and saying "This is art" merits twenty thousand dollars. It is too obvious. However, even the obvious has its place.

If I write a long didactic poem on art it will certainly not be about this.

December 18, 1963

Thanks for your good letter: I find you much more scrupulous about the treatment of religious subjects than most artists would be. In fact, the use of the "vexillum" or cross-flag in the iconography of the Resurrection [Hammer had done a painting of the Resurrection] is not common these days. I suppose it is a late-medieval motif, suggested by the Crusades. In any event, there is no reason on earth why you should even give it a second thought. The flag is simply a sign of victory, and I suppose it means that the artist wants you to recognize the Resurrection, in case the tomb does not look sufficiently like a tomb. There are certainly other ways of doing this.

Today is a bright, snowy morning, and it helps make one ready for Christmas. I hope that January will bring us some nice days. The middle of the month is out of the question for me (from the 18th to the 26th) because then we are on retreat and incommunicado. But in any case, things will work out and we will be able to get together in due time.

I like Pascal, and of course he was a fervent devotee of Port Royal, where they took the spiritual life seriously. I wonder if I sent you the meditation on Julien Green? I enclose one, it may have something in it

of a sardonic comment on that background, but on the other hand I have no notion of saints being dull. It is only the pseudo-saints that are oppressive. The real ones, from what I have read, are exceedingly lively. Of course, canonization manages to wash all the liveliness out of them and reduce them to safe limits, so that the *bien pensants* will not be disturbed.

August 5, 1964

It is good to see your handwriting again. This is a sign that things are going well and that you are recovering after your operation. But I am sorry to hear there is another one on the way. However, if it will be of some help, then that is good. I hope it, too, will be successful.

Will you be ready to come over on the 22nd? If so that would be a fine date for me . . . We are now on our summer schedule, which means that though still on Eastern Standard Time, we do everything an hour later. Thus while I can easily meet you at 11:15 in the winter, it will have to be about 12:15 in this season. In any case, unless I hear otherwise from you or Caroline, I will look forward to seeing you at 12:15 on the 22nd.

Please thank Carolyn (this time I have spelled it properly) for sending the two reprints ["Pleasant Hill: A Shaker Village in Kentucky," published in *Jubilee*]. I think I could use half a dozen more, if they can be spared. I believe the Shaker Foundation at Pittsfield wants to get reprints too. If anyone corresponds with them, they can be advised to apply to *Jubilee*. It is perfectly all right, as far as I am concerned, if any number of reprints are made.

Your Latin project sounds interesting and mysterious. For my part I am working on Celtic monks. They have some wonderful poetry, not, of course, that I can translate Gaelic but I read it in English when I can get it.

August 12, 1964

Perhaps your hernia operation is all over by now. I hope so, and hope that it has been successful. May you have a good rest and rebound in happy strength. After that I will look forward to seeing you and Carolyn here sometime soon. I will be eager to hear when it may be possible.

Your letter and the letter from Lexi[ngton] reached me. Actually, the book that I sent [through John Howard Griffin] to Clyde Kennard was a copy of your [limited edition] *Hagia Sophia*, and I know he was very glad to have it. He was then dying in a hospital in Chicago, of cancer. He had been "framed" by the Mississippi police for trying to register at Miss. State University, and had been put on a chain gang and very badly treated though he already had cancer. The story, as I hear it, was simply that he had been very pleased with the book and that it had given him some joy in his last days. It seems the story is becoming a bit amplified now. But still, it is good that we are both able to think we have helped such a person and brought something meaningful into a tragic life, which, however, was full of meaning because of his own dedication.

I hear that Jacques Maritain continues in good health, and I am glad of it. I have not heard from him for some time.

Please let me know when you will be well enough to come over.

November 3, 1964

I was so pleased to hear from you and to know that you are at least fairly well, that though I am no Latin poet I immediately attempted a poem. Here it is. I do not know if it scans. All I can say is that I think it does. The lines are supposed to be hexameters. If you hear a strange noise it is the whole choir of Latin poets turning in their graves. [The poem is called "A Prayer of Thanksgiving Written for Victor Hammer."]

O Tu, Pater Splendoris Dator luminis
Ad Te gaudens precor restituto lumine
Da quaesumus mihi servulo tecum perpetuam
Nox ubi non contristet corda vel umbra diem.

O thou Father of Splendor, Giver of Light,
To Thee I pray in joy, with light restored
Grant, I beg, to me Thy servant everlasting
Day in which no night makes sad the heart and no shadow [the day].
[*CP*, p. 1005]

It is certainly good to know that your eyes are serving you well again and that you are working along as usual, or more or less so. I can well understand that things might be tiring to you and I hope you will not attempt a trip over here until you are sure that it will not be a burden. Meanwhile, perhaps something else might offer itself. We shall see. But we can be patient and look forward to our next meeting whenever and wherever God wills it to be.

My hands are still afflicted with skin trouble though I can use them all right. But it is a nuisance. I suppose I will finally have to take some tests and find out precisely what the trouble is and what is to be done. My assumption is still that poison ivy started it all, but I never heard of it going on as long as this.

If you should hear news of my exhibiting strange blobs of ink in Louisville, ignore the information: it is not worthy of your notice. As always, my feelings about it are very mixed, but it was something that presented itself in such a way that I thought I could do it without harm to anyone. I think I have made plain to all concerned that I do not regard it as "art" and that they are not supposed to either . . .

Today I did not vote for Goldwater . . .

December 4, 1964

Yesterday I asked Father Abbot if I could perhaps have an exceptional permission to get over to Lexington to see you. He said that someone is driving over to the doctor on December 16th and that he would let me

go with them and have lunch with you, if this were possible. So I am writing to ask if that would be a good day for me to come over for lunch. It is Wednesday. I think that if that day is impossible for you, if you can suggest another thereabouts I might be able to get a ride. But in any case I hope I can see you and Carolyn and have lunch in your fine studio, as monastic as any monastery, and in fact more.

For my part things are going quite well. There is every likelihood now that I will be able to live at the hermitage continuously. In fact, I am already sleeping there and coming down for some of the offices and for my work in the novitiate, which still takes up quite a bit of time, but anyway in the night hours and in the afternoon at least I am in the woods and it certainly agrees with me. It seems to me that this is really what I came here for, at last, and that the community life has been somehow provisional and preparatory. However, we shall see what develops. Part of the agreement may end up by being a cutting off of contacts with visitors, perhaps almost completely. But as I say, we shall see. I will do my part and leave the rest up to Superiors with their concept of how things ought to be.

Meanwhile, I look forward to the joy of seeing you.

Very best wishes to both you and Carolyn. Yesterday I sent a copy of the new book [*Seeds of Destruction*], which is not like the others in many respects. God bless you. Is it really five years since I was last in Lexington?

January 9, 1965

Thanks for your letter. I am glad that you liked the "Pilgrimage" piece [see "From Pilgrimage to Crusade" in *Mystics and Zen Masters*] and I think you are right about the title. I will have to give it some thought. A more complete text with footnotes, etc., was published by a magazine called *Cithara* at St. Bonaventure University, New York. I had not thought about the title problem at that time, however. Marco Pallis also asked me to let him submit it to some magazine in England for which he himself writes. Incidentally, I have been trying to get the Columbia Record people interested in recording some of the works of Marco Pallis' group called "The English Consort of Viols." They must play a lot of things I would like to hear, especially settings of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century songs. Does the university library have a record collection from which one can borrow? Perhaps not. I would be interested in some of the original settings of songs by Edmund Waller, etc., if they exist and are there. But I suppose this is rather a complex and difficult request. You can suggest it to Carolyn, but probably nothing can be done.

Certainly I would be delighted to write some notes on your religious paintings for a booklet of reproductions. I think it is an excellent idea. I would have to look more at the paintings to get my thoughts in order. We shall see what comes of the project. But I am certainly willing to get

into it, though of course I cannot right at this instant. I still have a couple of prefaces and reviews hanging over my head.

Here are the best pictures I took, or rather two of them Carolyn took. They are not as bad as all that, in fact in every case I was disobeying the advice of the camera. So that just shows that one must not always bow to technology. In fact I am sure that if I did what the camera wanted and took the pictures with a flash, they would have been very stupid and insipid. As it is, they seem to me to have a little character.

It was very good to see you, and it is good to hear from you. Your writing is as firm and regular as ever, and I am sure that working on the "Resurrection" [painting, which he never completed] will keep your hand in trim. It is a pity you can't print "Pilgrimage." It is something I would love to have in a booklet from the Stamperia.

March 24, 1965

Thanks for your letter. I was glad to get it because I had been thinking about you and wondering how you were. I am happy to hear that things are going better.

The note of Maritain is splendid and I am delighted that he sent it. Your translation, as far as I can see, leaves nothing to be desired. You are correct in your rendering of "roman" and you need have no misgivings about it. I am returning Lexi's letter and the copy of the Maritain note.

I have been pretty busy, and have had the usual series of slight mishaps, trouble with an eye which was accidentally injured and so on. There is a fair amount of flu about in the monastery and I seem to be getting a bit of it. But that is all quite usual at this time of year. Later, after Easter, I am hoping that J. will be down.

Did I send you the notes on the eremitical life I put out recently? I think you might be interested. In any case, I enclose a copy, as I have plenty of them. Naturally this is the kind of thing I am most interested in at present . . .

June 23, 1965

Here is an uncorrected carbon copy of the complete Chuang Tzu ms. I will need it back before too long, so what I suggest is this: that you look through it and pick out the pieces you want, which you can copy, and if you like I will proof and read the copy to make sure it is all right. I do not mean to rush you, and certainly you can take a reasonable time, but I would like to have the ms. back, say, about the middle of August. Would that be all right? I hope you find it fairly legible.

Things were quite unpleasant in the hospital but they found out that the trouble was, as I thought, an infection. They gave me some antibiotics, which have cleared it up quite efficiently. So I am grateful for that.

I have very much enjoyed *The Tao of Painting*, which I will send back soon. Duveen is priceless. But I am afraid it has almost fallen apart. Could I borrow your copy of Eric Gill on *Clothes*?

Carolyn, I have here a copy of Giles's *Confucianism and Its Rivals*, which you sent me. I have never been clear if this was a loan or an extra that you wanted to get rid of. Could you please let me know.

July 11, 1966

Everything is going all right with me, do not worry about me; except for details like bursitis and now a sprained ankle, I imagine I will survive and go on to other follies, and I am not disturbed.

When do you suppose you will be able to come back this way again? Should we plan something for August? It is a bit hot now, though we had a fine wild storm here last night.

Carolyn, thanks for the books. I would like to look at the two books you do have of Jean Grenier since he is important for Camus.

August 29, 1966

Many thanks for your note and for Lexi's good letter, which I return herewith. Yes, I knew that Maritain was coming and I am delighted that he will be able to. I hope nothing gets in the way, as I look forward very much to being with him for a little while.

As to you, yes, by all means let us plan on something in September. The first Saturday is bad for me. The 10th, 17th, and 24th are all right, and maybe the 17th would be the best. However, any of those three will do. Just drop me a line when, and I will expect to meet you at the usual time.

Have we ever spoken of Thomas Mann? I do not recall. I have never really been able to get into him, but I see that I must quite probably read *Doktor Faustus*. Do you know it? It is apparently a horrifying indictment of modern art and culture and probably a hair-raising book to read. I wonder if Carolyn could get it for me. If you want to look at it before she sends it on, fine. Or perhaps you would prefer to look it over in German.

Does she perhaps have in the library any poems of Miguel Hernández? A modern Spanish poet who died in one of Franco's jails. I am very impressed by him. Not to be confused with Menéndez, a Peruvian.

December 24, 1966

Thanks very much for your two notes. I was very glad to hear from you and to know you were out of the hospital. I agree with you, a hospital is an awful place, and sometimes that is good only for getting out of. I hope everything will go well at home, and that you will get the necessary rest and make a quick recovery.

Any Saturday in January will be all right. Can we plan on the 7th or 14th? Those would both be good. In fact if it seemed we were going to have nice weather on the 31st and you felt like coming over then, just call me the day before, in the morning. But make sure I get the message. In any event, drop me a note when you hope to come.

April 24, 1967

Thanks for your letter of the other day. I was very pleased to hear from you and to receive a letter in your own handwriting, which shows you are better. The papers are going off to Friedrich Georg Juenger but I have not been able to find exactly the ones you asked for. However, the material I am sending is roughly equivalent—including, for example, the article that was recently in the *Saturday Review*, which has a bearing on technology, at least indirectly.

In such lovely weather as we have now, I wish I could spend a few hours quietly picnicking with you and Carolyn. The spring has been perfect. However, I shall probably have to be content with the hope of dropping in on you again in Lexington next time some friend of mine comes down with a car. I have been rather overvisited lately—largely for business reasons—and that has held up both work and correspondence.

The other day I sent the new book, and I want also to send you the little book (Cassiodorus) which they printed at Stanbrook. I like it in its splendor, but I prefer the simplicity of the Stamperia del Santuccio. But the nuns went to immense trouble to get paper and so on.

June 16, 1967

It was very good to hear from you again. Yes, I would very much like to come and see you and see the book too. I am not sure what I can plan just now, but I have a friend coming to visit and he will have a car. Perhaps then we will be able to drive over to Lexington. I am not sure when he will be coming. Perhaps next week. If he comes and I can get permission I will try to call you, but will come over to Lexington anyway . . .

It is rather hot now, and I suppose that is uncomfortable for you: it certainly is for me, as I do not get all the breeze in my cottage. However, I can go out into a cool place in the woods. I am reading [Lewis] Mumford's new book, which the publisher sent me as a reward for writing that letter to the *Times*, more or less.

Father Juenger sent me a nice letter and I must reply sometime. As to the Herrigel book on Zen: actually there are two, one of which is quite good—*Zen in the Art of Archery*.

Yes, you are right about "getting old." I have more aches than I used to have and the machinery runs less well from year to year. Not having found the secret of arresting the process, I must accept it as you also do. Let us rejoice that things are not worse and go on as happily as we can. I hope to see you soon, if I possibly can. I will let you know as soon as I have more definite plans.

On July 10, 1967, Hammer died in Lexington, Kentucky.

II.
War and Freedom

I just cannot in conscience, as a priest and as a writer who has a hearing with a lot of people, devote myself exclusively to questions of devotion, the life of prayer, or monastic history, and act as if we were not in the middle of the most serious crisis in Christian history.

TO JOSIAH G. CHATHAM

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1. The Cold War Letters

*In my biography of Thomas Merton (*Silent Lamp*), I have referred to a period in Merton's life which I call "The Year of the Cold War Letters." Not a calendar year, it is a period in his life that extends from October 1961 to October 1962. His first published article on war and peace, entitled "The Root of War Is Fear," appeared in the October 1961 issue of* The Catholic Worker. *From then till the end of April 1962, he wrote a flurry of articles, as well as one book, about the Christian's responsibility to work for peace and for the outlawing of war. On April 26, 1962, he was informed by his abbot, Dom James Fox, that the Abbot General of the Cistercian Order, Dom Gabriel Sortais, had sent orders that he was no longer to publish books or articles on the issues of war and peace.*

Merton obeyed the prohibition against publishing *anything on war and peace. Nevertheless, he continued to write articles, which, while unpublished, were privately circulated in mimeographed form among his friends. He even ventured two articles in 1963 in* The Catholic Worker *under pen names—Benedict Monk and Benedict Moore. The prohibition was eased somewhat after Pope John XXIII issued his encyclical* Pacem in Terris *in April 1963 and Merton did write some articles following the publication of the encyclical. But it is still a fact that the period from October 1961 to October 1962 was the most vigorous, concentrated, and productive period of Merton's writings on war and peace.*

*I have called this period "The Year of the Cold War Letters" because during this time Merton's many articles on war and peace were interlaced with a constant stream of letters to his friends in which he discussed the same topics. In the fall of 1961 Merton conceived the plan of putting together a book that would comprise selected letters of his own, written to a wide variety of people, and linked by the common themes of war and peace. Not only did he conceive the book, he also decided on a title—*The Cold War Letters. *It was a cleverly conceived plan, a way in which Merton could express his ideas without very much publicity coming his way. The letters would get to people who would be inclined to agree with his position and do something to implement it; at the same time there would be a*

minimal risk of their getting into the hands of those most opposed to his views.

I have no information as to the precise time of Merton's decision but I believe it may well have been about the same time as his Catholic Worker *article appeared. One indication is that the letters he selected began with October 1961 and ceased with October 1962; a second may be found in the letter he wrote on December 21, 1961, to Dr. Wilbur H. ("Ping") Ferry of the Santa Barbara Center for the Study of Democratic Institutions. He asked Ferry if he would be willing to circulate some of his material in mimeographed form. "I am having a bit of censorship trouble," he remarked casually and he made clear that getting his "stuff" around in this way would not require prior censorship. He then mentioned the Cold War Letters for the first time, as an example of material that could be circulated in this private fashion. "I have, for instance, some copies of letters to people—to make up a book called* Cold War Letters. *Very unlikely to be published (!)." At that time Merton would have had only eleven such letters, yet the collection of Cold War Letters finally mimeographed consisted of forty-nine letters in its early edition (circulated in the late spring of 1962) and 111 in a collection circulated in January 1963, the latter including a preface by Thomas Merton.*

What I am suggesting is that the Cold War Letters were not, as many have believed, an afterthought that came to Merton in the wake of the prohibition to publish on the topic of war and peace. Quite the contrary, the idea was a part of his thinking almost from the moment he decided to enter the "war on war." This may well suggest that the letters that eventually became part of this collection were written at least with some eye to their possible inclusion in The Cold War Letters.

"The Year of the Cold War Letters" needs to be singled out as a unique year in the life of Thomas Merton. Articles on war and peace are interwoven with Cold War Letters to form a literary fabric out of which emerges a fairly clear image of Thomas Merton the peacemaker. The Cold War Letters were mimeographed and put together with a spiral binding. The letters are arranged in chronological order, and he identified his correspondents only by initials and place. After a good bit of detective work, I have been able to identify by name all the correspondents except one—Letter 50 to W. D., Oyster Bay, Long Island. Some of the Cold War Letters have appeared in previous volumes of the Merton correspondence: thirty-seven are in The Hidden Ground of Love, *ten are in* The Road to Joy, *one is in* The School of Charity, *and five are in* The Courage for Truth. *These are listed in their proper order, though their texts are not reprinted here.*

There is a richness to the Cold War Letters that goes beyond their specific topic. Merton often branches off into other areas that have nothing to do with war and peace. To the expanded version of The Cold War Letters, *he added the preface which follows.*

The Cold War Letters: Preface

These copies of letters written over a period of little more than one year preceding the Cuban Crisis of 1962 [the confrontation between Kennedy and Khrushchev over the deployment of missiles in Cuba] have been made for friends who might be expected to understand something of the writer's viewpoint, even when they might not agree with all he has said, still less with all that he may have unconsciously implied.

As a matter of fact, the letters themselves have been copied practically without change, except that the more irrelevant parts have been cut out. There have been none of the careful corrections, qualifications, and omissions which would be required before such a book could possibly be considered for general circulation, or even for any but the most limited and private reading. As it stands, it lies open to all kinds of misinterpretation, and malevolence will not find it difficult to read into these pages the most sinister of attitudes. A few words in a preface may then serve to deny in advance the possible allegations of witch hunters.

There is no witch here, no treason and no subversion. The letters form part of no plot. They incite to no riot, they suggest no disloyalty to government, they are not pandering to destructive machinations of revolutionaries or foreign foes. They are nothing more than the expression of loyal but unpopular opinion, of democratic opposition to what seem to be irresponsible trends. Without such voices raised in opposition to grim policies and majority compulsions, democracy would be without meaning. The writer is then confident that the values of free speech and free opinion traditional in the Western world are still not so far subverted by totalitarian thinking as to make these letters, even in their carelessness, and at times in their confusion, totally unacceptable.

There are certainly statements made in these pages which the writer no longer holds just as they stand. There is much that might have been modified since the letters were written or copied. There are many expressions that the writer would be ready to withdraw or soften without more ado. The letters were written, as most letters are, in haste, in the heat of the moment, and the moments of that year were often unusually fraught with excitement. The perspectives of these letters are then often distorted by indignation or by vehement protest. It is hoped that this may not cause them to be too grossly misinterpreted. Perhaps it is not out of place that those readers for whom these letters are not intended and of whose business they are none, may be asked politely to withhold their judgment. The author is not, never was, and never will be a Communist. The author in fact detests every type of totalitarian coercion, under whatever form, palliated by whatever high-sounding and humanitarian excuse. These letters are, indeed, biased by a frank hatred of power politics and by an uninhibited contempt for those who use power to distort the truth or to silence it altogether. The somewhat belligerent tone—usually more bel-

ligerent than the writer himself would like it to be—should be heard against this background of easily aroused indignation which the writer generally hopes is righteous. But of course such indignation is not always, in the event, as justified as one might hope.

What is the ground for the general protest uttered in these pages? It is the conviction that the United States, in the Cold War, are in grave danger of ceasing to be what they claim to be: the home of liberty, where justice is defended with free speech, where truth is accessible to everybody, where everybody is alike responsible, enlightened, and concerned, and where responsibility is sustained by a deep foundation of ethics. In actual fact it would seem that during the Cold War, if not during World War II, this country has become frankly a warfare state built on affluence, a power structure in which the interests of big business, the obsessions of the military, and the phobias of political extremists both dominate and dictate our national policy. It also seems that the people of the country are by and large reduced to passivity, confusion, resentment, frustration, thoughtlessness and ignorance, so that they blindly follow any line that is unraveled for them by the mass media.

There has been above all a tendency to insulation behind a thick layer of misinformation and misinterpretation, so that the majority opinion in the United States is now a highly oversimplified and mythical view of the world divided into two camps: that of darkness (our enemies) and that of light (ourselves). The enemy is totally malevolent and totally dedicated to evil. We are totally innocent and committed, by our very nature, to truth, goodness, and light. In consequence of this, everything the enemy does is diabolical and everything we do is angelic. His H-bombs are from hell and ours are the instruments of divine justice. It follows that we have a divinely given mission to destroy this hellish monster and any steps we take to do so are innocent and even holy.

Now, there is no question of the evil of Communism, but the evil is more complex and more variable than we are willing to think. And furthermore our own economic and political system is not always either just or ideal . . .

It is a curious fact that those who insist that the only way to peace is the hard-nosed and stiff-necked way of missile rattling and nuclear threats, are developing a mentality that is insensitive to the realities of nuclear war, and indifferent to the missiles and menaces of the enemy. Indeed it is counted bravery and patriotism to ignore the realities of the situation or to shrug them off with a few platitudes about the number of megacorpses we are ready to tolerate. Such thinking seems to be more prevalent in the United States than anywhere else except perhaps Soviet China, and obviously fanaticism of this type is able to dispose of the rationality which, it is assumed, will be "deterred" by H-bombs from rash and suicidal actions.

The protest in these letters is not, however, merely against the danger or the horror of war. It is not dictated by the fear that few lives

might be lost, or that property might be destroyed, or even that millions of lives might be lost and civilization itself destroyed. The protest is not merely against physical destruction, still less against physical danger, but against a suicidal moral evil and a total lack of ethics and rationality with which international policies tend to be conducted. True, President Kennedy is a shrewd and sometimes adventurous leader. He means well and has the highest motives, and he is, without doubt, in a position sometimes so impossible as to be absurd. The same can be said of any national leader. I would not judge that any of the great ones today—even Khrushchev or Mao Tse-tung—are unexampled crooks or psychotics like Hitler.

Unfortunately there seems to me to be a general air of insanity about the whole conduct of public life today, even though the leaders are well-intentioned and "well-adjusted" men, and this is what makes it morally impossible for most people *even to consider objectively* the fact that war might no longer be a rational way of settling international differences. *It is taken for granted* that the mere idea of questioning recourse to war as a valid, rational, and ethical means of settling problems is not only absurd but may even be treasonable. There are not lacking moralists, Catholic theologians, who can argue that there exists a *moral obligation* to threaten Russia with nuclear destruction! In the opinion of the present writer such opinions are not only disgraceful, scandalous, and unchristian, but also plainly idiotic. They make far less sense than the measured mumblings of the theological experts who, in Galileo's day, did not want the earth to turn about the sun.

The writer is a Catholic, devoted to his Church, to his faith and to his vocation. He does not believe that in differing from theologians like these, even when they may perhaps be bishops, he is turning against Christ or the Church. On the contrary he believes himself obliged in conscience to follow the line of thought which has been made quite clear by the modern Popes, particularly Pius XII and John XXIII, who have repeatedly pleaded for rational and peaceful ways of settling disputes, and who have forcefully declared that the uninhibited recourse to destructive violence in total war, nuclear or conventional, is "a sin, an offense and an outrage" (Pius XII).

The protest in these letters is then the same as the protest of Pope Pius XII, who said that total and indiscriminate nuclear war would be "a crime worthy of the most severe national and international sanctions" (to World Medical Congress, 1954).

The appeal of these letters is the same as the appeal of Pope John XXIII repeatedly urging national leaders to "shun all thought of force."

It is the same as the appeal of Cardinal Meyer of Chicago in his Lenten pastoral of 1962, where he said, "We are overcome by evil not only if we allow Communism to take over the world but if we allow the methods and standards of Communism to influence our own. If we adopt a policy of hatred, of liquidation of those who oppose us, of unrestrained use of total war, of a spirit of fear and panic, of exaggerated propaganda,

of unconditional surrender, or pure nationalism, we have already been overcome by the evil."

To hold that nuclear war is an evil to be avoided at all costs is not the same as holding that one must make "peace at any price." Those who cling, with an almost psychotic obsessiveness, to the "red or dead" alternative, as if no other choice could be possible, are simply admitting their incapacity to face the problems of our time in an adult and rational way. The greatest tragedy of our time is not the mere existence of nuclear weapons but the apparent incapacity of men to think in terms that will enable them to deal with the problem of these weapons effectively.

It is certainly true that international cooperation must finally bring about the control and even the abolition of war, if the human race is to survive. It is of course equally true that this effort must proceed in such a way that it does not capsize in a sudden seizure of power by one of the great antagonists. How this is to be done, nobody can yet clearly see. But until really honest efforts are made surely nobody is even going to look at the problems squarely. We are living in a condition where we are afraid to see the total immorality and absurdity of total war. One reason for this incapacity is the fact that the whole nation is fattening on the profits of the war industries and on the production of fantastically expensive and complex weapons that are obsolete almost before they are produced.

The burden of protest in these letters is simply that such a state of affairs is pure madness, that to accept it without question as right and reasonable is criminally insane and that in the presence of such fantastically absurd and suicidal iniquity the Christian conscience cannot keep silent.

Merton's first article on war and peace appeared in the Catholic Worker *issue of October 1961. The first Cold War Letters were written that same month. The complete list follows.*

1. To E.G. (Etta Gullick), Oxford, c. October 25, 1961 (HGL, *p. 346).*

2. To John C. Heidbrink, Nyack, N.Y., October 30, 1961 (HGL, *p. 402).*

3. To Paulo Alceu Amoroso Lima, Rio de Janeiro, November 1961 (CT, *pp. 164–66).*

In November 1961, Merton's article "Shelter Ethics" was published in The Catholic Worker *(in response to an article by L. C. McHugh, S.J., in the September 30, 1961, issue of* America*).*

4. To M.S. (Maynard Shelly, editor of The Mennonite*), Newton, Kan., December 1961.*

Thank you for your kind letter of November 14. I am looking forward to receipt of the copy of *The Mennonite* which contains my poem about the extermination camps. I am happy that you saw fit to use it and I am proud to appear in your magazine.

Certainly it is most necessary for all to realize that the terrible situation in the world today is a vivid sign in which the mercy of God seeks to spell out the truth of our sins and win us to repentance. The agonizing thing is to see how inexorably all mankind, even with the best and most honest of intentions, remain blind and indifferent to the light which is offered them. If we only knew how to read the "signs of the times." It seems that even the faithful who have sincerely clung to the Gospel truth, and are not just Christians for social reasons and for prestige, have lost their sensitivity to these things . . .

Surely we ought to see now that repentance means something far deeper than we have suspected: it can no longer be a matter of setting things right according to the norms of our own small group, the immediate society in which we live. We have to open our hearts to a universal and all-embracing love that knows no limits and no obstacles, a love that is not scandalized by the sinner, a love that takes upon itself the sins of the world. There must be total love of all, even of the most distant, even of the most hostile. Without the gift of the Holy Spirit this is mere idealism, mere dreaming. But the Spirit who knows all things and can do all things, He can be in us the power of love that heals, unites, and redeems, for thus the Blood of Jesus Christ reaches all men through us.

It is with these thoughts in mind that I tell you what respect and reverence I have for the Mennonite tradition of peaceful action and non-violence. Though not a total pacifist in theory myself, I certainly believe that every Christian should try to practice non-violence rather than violence and that some should bind themselves to follow only the way of peace as an example to the others. I myself as a monk do not believe it would be licit for me ever to kill another human being even in self-defense and I would certainly never attempt to do so. There are much greater and truer ways than this. Killing achieves nothing. Finally, though as I said in theory I would still admit some persons might licitly wage war to defend themselves (for instance the Hungarians in 1956), yet I think that nuclear war is out of the question, it is beyond all doubt murder and sin, and it must be banned forever. Since in practice any small war is likely to lead to nuclear war, I therefore believe in practice that war must be absolutely banned and abolished today as a method of settling international disputes.

5. *To E.F. (Erich Fromm), Mexico City, December 1961* (HGL, *pp. 317–19*).

6. *To J.T.E. (John Tracy Ellis), Washington, December 7, 1961* (HGL, *pp. 174–75*).

7. To L.F. (Lawrence Ferlinghetti), San Francisco, December 1961 (CT, *pp. 270–72*).

8. To B.S. (Bruno Schlesinger), Notre Dame, December 13, 1961 (HGL, *pp. 541–43*).

9. To J.R. (probably should be T.R., Archbishop Thomas Roberts, S.J.), London, December 1961.

I do not have a totally clear picture of the situation, but clear enough to understand something of the essential problem, and to feel, with you, deep concern. For here, in this whole tormented problem in which we are all involved, and you more than most, it is not merely the rights of this or that person, but the honor and holiness of the Church as the guardian of truth and the minister of mercy and salvation to men. I have no hesitation in agreeing with you that I must expect a small amount of what has been visited on you. I think this is going to be the *only* visible fruit of most of our protests in favor of peace, honesty, truth, and fidelity to the Law of Christ. This is of course to me a shattering and totally disconcerting question, and I do not hesitate to admit to you that it reaches down into the very foundations of my life and, but for the grace of God, might shake them beyond repair.

Do you mind if I give you a little news of my own very small problems? As I may or may not have indicated, and as you certainly know very well: the situation in this country is extremely serious. It amounts in reality to a moral collapse, in which the policy of the nation is more or less frankly oriented toward a war of extermination. Everybody else claims not to "want" this, certainly. But step by step we come closer to it because the country commits itself more and more to policies which, but for a miracle, will make it inevitable.

This gradual process is accepted with fatalistic indifference or ignored in a spirit of irresponsibility and passivity. The most scandalous thing of all, and this has been stated very explicitly by some few sane people who are still pointing to the danger, is that the Church and her clergy have been almost completely silent. In some cases, statements that have been made have tended rather to promote an atmosphere of hatred and irresponsibility, like the famous Fr. McHugh, of your Society, with his advice to take a revolver into your shelter with you and kill anyone who tries to get in [see *America*, September 30, 1961]. Such is the climate in which we are now living in America.

In this situation I have felt that it would be a matter of fidelity to my vocation as a Christian and as a priest, and by no means in contradiction with my state as a monk, to try to show clearly that our gradual advance toward nuclear war is morally intolerable and even criminal and that we have to take the most serious possible steps to realize our condition and do something about it.

The question is, what does one do?

At present my feeling is that the most urgent thing is to say what has to be said and say it in any possible way. If it cannot be printed, then let it be mimeographed. If it cannot be mimeographed, then let it be written on the backs of envelopes, as long as it gets said. But then, of course, what is the purpose of saying things just for the sake of saying them, without hope of their having any effect? Am I not reduced to doing what they demand of me, to sit in silence and make no protest?

I realize, of course, that if I were a holier person, if I had been more faithful to God's will all along the line, if I were less undermined by my own contradictions, I would have much more of the needed strength and clarity. Perhaps the Lord wants me to keep silence lest by my writing I do more harm than good. I don't know. And it seems impossible to get a clear idea of what ought to be done . . .

10. To E.K. (Ethel Kennedy), Washington, December 1961 (HGL, *pp. 444–46*).

11. To D.D. (Dorothy Day), New York, December 20, 1961 (HGL, *pp. 140–43*).

12. To E.D. (Edward Deming Andrews), Pittsfield, Mass., December 21, 1961 (HGL, *p. 36*).

13. To J.C. (Josiah G. Chatham), Jackson, Miss., December 1961.

I think that in this awful issue of nuclear war there is involved much more than the danger of physical evil. The Lord knows that is enormous enough. What concerns me, perhaps this is pride, is the ghastly feeling that we are all on the brink of a spiritual defection and betrayal of Christ, which would consist in the complete acceptance of the values and the decisions of the callous men of war who think only in terms of megacorpses and megatons, and have not the slightest thought for man, the image of God.

I know the moral theologians are very wise in their circumspect avoidance of self-commitment to anything but very "safe" positions. But all of a sudden it seems to me that these safe positions yawn wide open and where they open is right into the depths of hell. That is not what I call safety. The German clergy, the German Catholic press, even the German bishops, some of them, got in there behind Hitler and said that his war was just. They urged all the faithful to give the Vaterland everything they had. This they did in order, in some measure, to try to keep peace with a tyrant who threatened to destroy the Church. Their action did nothing whatever to keep men like Fr. Metzger from being executed, or to save hundreds of priests and religious from Dachau . . .

I just cannot in conscience, as a priest and a writer who has a hearing with a lot of people, devote myself exclusively to questions of devotion, the life of prayer, or monastic history, and act as if we were not in the

middle of the most serious crisis in Christian history. It is to me incomprehensible that so many other writers and theologians and whatnot simply ignore this question or, if they treat it, do so in a manner that encourages people to line up with a frankly godless and pragmatic power bloc, the immense wealth and technical capacity of which is directed entirely to nuclear annihilation of entire nations, without distinction between civilians and combatants.

14. To E.G. (Etta Gullick), Oxford, December 22, 1961 (HGL, *pp. 348–50*).

15. To J.B. (Jeanne Burdick), Topeka, December 26, 1961 (HGL, *pp. 108–10*).

16. To R.L. (Robert Lax), December 1961 (RJ, *p. 173*).

17. To C.L. (Clare Boothe Luce), New York, December 1961 or January 1962.

What can I say about those three utterly magnificent books? Especially the Giotto. I cannot remember when I have seen anything so fine as this last, and yet we have lived in a time when marvelous things are produced. I remember most of the Giottos from Santa Croce, especially St. Francis before the soldan, which for some reason hit me very hard and has always stayed with me. Now that I am very interested in Moslems, and have contact with some, I think I understand the reason why. But what the book gives that nothing else can is the appreciation of all the marvelous detail. It is an unending pleasure for me and for the novices, and we are all still wondering at it.

Thank you, then, for having added to our Christmas this wonder. And it has been a marvelous Christmas for me. The darkest in my life and yet in many ways the clearest and most radiant. Dark of course because of the situation we are all in. And radiant because one comes to understand that darkness is there for a reason also. That the Light has come into darkness which has not understood it: this we have known long since. But we have not known all the implications. Nor have we understood the immense depth of the mystery which we nevertheless know by rote: that the Light not only shall and will triumph over the darkness, but already has. This is not a spiritual bromide, it is the heart of our Christian faith. Have you ever read the English mystic Julian (sometimes wrongly called Juliana) of Norwich? I will write to you about her sometime. She is a mighty theologian, in all her simplicity and love.

Though "all manner of things shall be well," we cannot help but be aware, on the threshold of 1962, that we have enormous responsibilities and tasks of which we are perhaps no longer capable. Our sudden, unbalanced, top-heavy rush into technological mastery has left us without the spiritual means to face our problems. Or rather, we have thrown the

spiritual means away. Even the religious people have not been aware of the situation, not become aware until perhaps too late. And here we all stand as prisoners of our own scientific virtuosity, ruled by immense power that we ought to be ruling and cannot. Our weapons dictate what we are to do. They force us into awful corners. They give us our living, they sustain our economy, they bolster up our politicians, they sell our mass media, in short we live by them. But if they continue to rule us we will also most surely die by them . . .

It shows what comes of believing in science more than in God. The business about Pharaoh in Exodus is not so far out after all, is it? Bricks without straw, and more than that. Faith is the principle of the only real freedom we have. Yet history is full of the paradox that the liberation of the mind of man by Christianity did a great deal to make the development of science possible too. Yet you can't blame all this on the Bible or on the Greeks or on the Council of Nicaea (which brought into the spotlight the meaning of the Person). There was also too much underground that we didn't know about, I presume.

I don't want to waste your time philosophizing. But I do want to say this one thing. We are in an awfully serious hour for Christianity, for our own souls. We are faced with the necessity to be very faithful to the Law of Christ, and His truth. This means that we must do everything that we reasonably can to find our way peacefully through the mess we are in. Yet we remain responsible for doing the things that "are for our peace." ("Jerusalem, Jerusalem, if thou hadst known the things that are for thy peace . . . and now there shall not be left of thee a stone upon a stone.")

We have to be articulate and sane, and speak wisely on every occasion where we can speak, and to those who are willing to listen. That is why for one I speak to you. We have to try to some extent to preserve the sanity of this nation, and keep it from going berserk, which will be its destruction, and ours, and perhaps also the destruction of Christendom.

I wanted to say these few things, as we enter the New Year. For it is going to be a crucial year, and in it we are going to have to walk sanely, and in faith, and with great sacrifice, and with an almost impossible hope . . .

18. To W.S. (Walter Stein), Leeds, England, December 1961 or January 1962.

I have your letter of the 12th and am glad to hear from you. As I said in the letter to the people of the Merlin Press, I found the book edited by you [*Nuclear Weapons and the Christian Conscience*, 1961] very impressive. What struck me most was the fact that the level was high, the thinking was energetic and uncompromising, and I was stimulated by the absence of the familiar clichés, or by worn-out mannerisms which have served us all in the evasion of real issues. For example (without applying these criticisms to any other book in particular), I was very struck by the superiority of your book over *Morals and Missiles*, which never-

theless had some good things in it. But *Morals and Missiles* had that chatty informality which the Englishman of Chesterton's generation thought he had to adopt as a protection whenever he tried to speak his mind on anything serious. Thank God you have thrown that off, because it emasculates a lot of very good thought.

At the moment, the publisher [James Laughlin] here is hesitating a bit because he finds your book "hard," but I am going to give him the business on that. It is necessary that for once a book be a little hard. We are submerged in all kinds of confused journalism on this awful issue, and there is very little thought. I do hope, however, to get some very good things. Lewis Mumford has said some of the clearest and most pointed moral judgments on nuclear warfare that have been uttered in this country and I hope for at least one—possibly two—fine essays of his. Erich Fromm is a psychiatrist whom you may or may not know. He is a leftist and is outspoken, appearing in all sorts of places, and operating from Mexico. He has a good book out called *May Man Prevail.* I'll send you a copy because I think I can dig up an extra one somewhere. There are several essays the publisher especially wants, about the effects of bombs and the uselessness of civil defense measures. Most of the material at this end is about the psychology of the present nuclear crisis in this country, not that I want it to be this way. And I am hoping to get something constructive about a way toward peace. The title of the book is provisionally *The Human Way Out* [the final title was *Breakthrough to Peace*] though I am afraid there is not yet a great deal about the way out, except for the moral principles in your collection. I am of course going to hold out for the inclusion of your whole book in this anthology, and I think the publisher will see the point of it. He ought to come down here in a couple of weeks and we will come to our conclusions then.

Many of us here feel that 1962 is going to be awfully critical. Humanly speaking, the mentality of this country, as I now understand it, is about as bad as it could be. Utterly sinister, desperate, belligerent, illogical . . . The one hope is that a lot of people who have more sense are protesting and there is a real communication going on among them which is quite heartening. But one wonders just what can be done, when the country is in the grip of the business-military complex that lives on the weapons and is dominated by them . . .

I am seriously wondering if the efforts some of us are making (a belated formation of an American Pax group, etc.) can have more than symbolic value. This may sound pessimistic, and of course it is. But it is not so pessimistic that it excludes the dimensions of a real hope: a hope that is not seen. What is seen seems to me to be more or less hopeless, at the moment. The debacle is at hand, and it is a question of helping to save what God wills to save, not of preserving present structures that seem to me to be doomed. For the very effort to preserve them is what is bringing on the disaster. However, I do not pretend to weigh and measure things on such an enormous scale. I think our first duty is to

preserve the human measure and to stay on the level where judgment is pertinent and does not become pure hubris. That is what the essays in your book and their judgments seem to me to affirm clearly and sanely: the human and the Christian measure . . .

19. To J.G.M. (Jean Goss-Mayr), Vienna, January 1, 1962 (HGL, *pp. 325–26*).

20. To S.T. (Sister Thérèse Lentfoehr), Wisconsin, January 11, 1962 (RJ, *p. 239*).

21. To G.Z. (Gordon Zahn), Chicago, January 11, 1962 (HGL, *pp. 649–51*).

22. To S.E. (Sister Emmanuel de Souza y Silva, O.S.B.), Petrópolis, Brazil, January 16, 1962 (HGL, *pp. 186–88*).

23. To J.F. (John Ford, S.J.), Washington, January 1962.

You may see an article of mine in *Commonweal* these days [February 9]. This too, I regret to say, is a bit sweeping and shows something of the lack of perspective from which I necessarily suffer to some extent. It was written before I got in touch with you and I have not had an opportunity to make changes, expecting it to appear from issue to issue. Since it is in *Commonweal*, however, I think the readers will know how to qualify the statements to some extent. If not, well, they will find people to tell them, I am sure!

I suffer from my limitations, and I wish I were more of a professional, because an increased sophistication and a deeper experience of the problems and methods would help me serve the truth much better: and of course that is what I want to do. But I must say this: I am very deeply concerned with what seems to me to be the extreme reticence and hesitation on the part of Catholics who might take a position for peace, or for a more positive and constructive approach to world problems, when there seem to be quite a few irresponsible voices, which have great influence on some of the faithful, giving the impression that the Church needs and even wants a kind of nuclear crusade against the godless Communists. I do not claim to be an expert in world affairs, but the superficial knowledge that I have of the arms race and of present-day military policies and the power involved in them, shows me that there is not much chance of the things we want to defend actually surviving a nuclear war—even a "limited" one, which would necessarily affect at least some cities.

It is for that reason that I believe that I am obliged, out of fidelity to Our Lord and to my priestly and religious vocation, to state very definitely some alternative to this awful passivity and lotus-eating irresponsibility which, in the end, delivers us all over bound hand and foot into the power of political forces that know nothing of God or morality,

whether natural or divine. Sure, the theologians are divided, and the bishops rely on the theologians. But can't the theologians and the bishops say something? Can't there be some constructive and courageous discussion? Can't there be some show of genuine concern? Father, my heart is very sick with the feeling that we don't give the impression of caring at all what happens to man, the image of God. We seem to be concerned more with abstractions. Of course I know we are all warmly devoted to those around us and to our students, penitents, and whatnot. But as other Christs we should have universal horizons and we should not be limited by any dividing line whatever. We should be just as concerned about man in Russia and man in China as about man in America. How is it possible that we should, with equanimity, toss around statistics and estimates of deaths running into the millions and then proceed to justify these deaths, and even justify them on the basis of our Christian faith and loyalty to the Church? I know you agree with me that there is something terribly wrong somewhere . . .

But of one thing I am convinced: the vital importance of a forceful and articulate Catholic position, in this country, in favor of peace, rather than the permissive and silent attitude that seems to prevail at the moment. We seem to be able to get excited over everything but the important problem. We are deeply involved in a movement toward a war of annihilation which certainly promises to be criminal, and the Pope certainly seems to fear this.

Father, I am trying your patience. But I do so knowing that you are interested not only for my own sake but for the sake of the Church. And I know you will have wise advice to give me. I do need opportunities for some kind of dialogue. One cannot develop correct views of issues like this in a vacuum. So I trust your charity to bear with me.

24. To M.B. (Mary Childs Black), Williamsburg, c. January 24, 1962.

I need not tell you how I would love to be there on February 2nd. There are few earthly desires I cherish more than the desire to see the Shaker spiritual drawings in the original. I am still hoping that the collection may find its way out here. It is with great regret that I must decline your kind invitation. I never obtain permission to travel that far or indeed to travel at all merely for a "social" occasion. This would be called a social occasion, I suppose. Though to me it would be more.

Recently, though, I did have the happiness to get to the old Pleasant Hill Shaker Community near here, and even took some photographs which came out quite well and I hope I will be able to use them in a little photo essay on the place and on the Shakers. The ideas have not crystallized out yet, and one must give them time. I know Edward Andrews will be interested, though.

This much I can do: share with you all a few thoughts that are at work in my mind about the Shakers and their deep significance, which manifests itself in a hidden and archetypal way in their art, craftsmanship

and in all their works. Their spirit is perhaps the most authentic expression of the primitive American "mystery" or "myth": the paradise myth. The New World, the world of renewal, of return to simplicity, to the innocence of Adam, the recovery of the primeval cosmic simplicity, the reduction of divisions, the restoration of unity. But not just a return to the beginning, it is also an anticipation of the end. The anticipation of eschatological fulfillment, of completion, the New World was an earnest and a type of the New Spiritual Creation.

In the secular realm this consciousness was of course very pronounced, the consciousness of the pioneer and later of the businessman who thought that America could literally be the earthly paradise. The belief that there was nothing impossible, that all goodness and all happiness was there for the asking. And in the poor of other lands, America existed as the place where they thought gold could be picked up on the streets.

For the Shakers, it was a different consciousness, for at the same time they saw the deceptiveness of the secular hope, and their eyes were open, in childlike innocence, to the evil, the violence, the unscrupulousness that too often underlay the secular vision of the earthly paradise. It was a paradise in which the Indian had been slaughtered and the Negro was enslaved. In which the immigrant was treated as an inferior being, and in which he had to work very hard for the "gold" that was to be "picked up in the streets."

The Shakers realized that to enter into a genuine contact with the reality of the "paradise spirit" which existed in the wonderful new world, they had to undergo a special kind of conversion. And their conversion had this special, unique, wonderful quality in that it, more than any other "spirit," grasped the unique substance of the American paradise myth, and embodied it in a wonderful expression. For myths are realities, and they themselves open into deeper realms. The Shakers apprehended something totally original about the spirit and the vocation of America. This has remained hidden to everyone else. The sobering thing is that their vision was eschatological! And they themselves ended.

24 (number repeated). To V.H. (Victor Hammer), c. January 25, 1962 (see this volume, pp. 6–7).

25. To J.F. (James H. Forest), January 29, 1962 (HGL, *pp. 261–63).*

26. To W.H.F. (Wilbur H. Ferry), Santa Barbara, January 30, 1962 (HGL, *pp. 205–8).*

27. To E.A.S. (Evora Arca de Sardinia), January 31, 1962 (see this volume, p. 78).

28. To E.E. (Elsa Englander), Linz, Austria, February 4, 1962.

I was happy to hear from you again and have very much enjoyed the beautiful book of Austrian churches, *Glanz des Ewigen*. Like you, I feel many pangs of nostalgia over the wonderful unappreciated grace of the civilization that is inexorably perishing all around us. Austria has been such a wonderful rich and living source of this European Christian culture. Mozart represents for me all the purest and best in the Austrian and Christian genius, and those unabashed excesses of baroque attempt to keep up with his inexhaustible imagination. They do not of course succeed, but they have their charm and their boldness. I admire especially the daring of baroque that was not afraid to risk terrible lapses of taste, and yet managed almost always to come off with some marvels of ingenuity and playfulness. In former days I found it hard to take seriously but now I think nevertheless its significance grows on me. I suppose it is terribly out of fashion. As for the older Austrian churches, especially the earliest of all, they are simply enchanting. So your gift has given me great pleasure and made me secretly homesick for the Europe I shall never see again . . .

There is no question that we live in an age of revolutionary change, perhaps even of cataclysm. We cannot simply cling to the past, yet we must advance into the future while trying to preserve what is relevant and vital in the past, insofar as we can. It is of the greatest importance that we advance peacefully. If by miscalculation or accident, or even by the pride and fury of men, war breaks out again, then there is every danger that nothing at all will be left of what was valuable and great in Europe. And all the wonderful possibilities of North America will be destroyed. It is a shame that we have such great capabilities and so little wisdom.

I keep you in my masses and in my prayers. May the love of Christ protect your heart and may you rejoice in His peace. But in our time it is not possible to have a peace that is altogether without sorrow nor should we even desire it, for sorrow is salutary in such an age.

29. To J.T.E. (John Tracy Ellis), Washington, February 4, 1962 (HGL, *pp. 175–77).*

(There is no letter 30. There are, however, two letters numbered 24.)

31. To J.F. (James Forest), New York, February 6, 1962 (HGL, *pp. 263–64).*

32. To J.F.S. (Frank J. Sheed?), New York, February 1962.

It has taken me a little time to get around to answering your letter, because I did not want to just dash off a hasty note. Certainly it is important to explain this matter if it is causing comment and upsetting some people, hence I will try to do so.

I can see that the leaflet ["The Root of War"], being cheaply printed, and perhaps circulated in a random and irresponsible-seeming way, might cause suspicion in some minds. It is put out by a very poor group of Catholics who, however, number among them some quite saintly people. The leaflet consists largely of part of a chapter from a book [*New Seeds of Contemplation*], and doubtless those who read it in the context of the book will find it less surprising. Added to that are a few introductory paragraphs which were written in the heat of the moment when I was shocked by the highly regrettable public statement of a Jesuit Father [L. C. McHugh] who seemed to be advising people to be completely ruthless and selfish and keep others out of their shelter, with a gun if necessary. There you have the background.

I know that this whole unpleasant issue of war is a delicate one to handle. I know too that people are very upset and excitable, and that it is difficult to keep a straight perspective when discussing such a critical problem. It is very unfortunate that many people think that the mere fact of hesitating to approve an all-out nuclear war makes a man by that very fact a Communist.

Now this is the real danger I am getting at. We have got to try to keep our heads and judge this war problem with traditional moral standards. We have got to remember that such standards still exist. Even some of our clergy are stretching things quite far. I personally believe it is my duty to explain and spread the clear teaching that has been given by the Popes for the last twenty years, and they have stated very forcefully what our duty is. Of course they have not condemned nuclear war formally, but they want us to be extremely careful and to try at all costs to find some other way of settling international problems.

It does not seem to me that this fact is clearly realized in America, and consequently I have felt obliged to state my opinion, and to call attention, where possible, to what the Popes have said. The most recent utterance is that of John XXIII, last Christmas, when he spoke in the most solemn terms, both pleading with and warning national leaders and publicists to shun all thought of force.

It is certainly true that Communism presents an immense danger. It is a terrible menace to the Church and to free society. But that does not mean that the only answer is nuclear war. We have a choice between the arduous and sacrificial path of negotiation and the insane course of destruction. Public opinion is still very important. As Christians we are bound to make our choice in the light of God's will as expressed by the teachings of the Church. It is true that there is a lot of loose talk and debate. A witless pacifism is no answer. There is no question of just giving up. We have to seek and find the sane middle path, to protect our faith and our freedom while at the same time keeping peace.

The February 9, 1962, issue of Commonweal *carried an article by Merton entitled "Nuclear War and Christian Responsibility." The article was criticized in* The

Catholic Standard *(the archdiocesan paper of Washington, D.C.) in an article probably written by Auxiliary Bishop Philip Hannan. It was also criticized in a letter to* Commonweal *(April 20, 1962) by Joseph G. Hill. Merton's reply was published in the same issue and became Cold War Letter 49. The* Commonweal *article Merton rewrote several times.*

33. To E.R. (Edward Rice), New York, February 10, 1962 (RJ, *p. 285).*

34. To B.S. (Bruno P. Schlesinger), Notre Dame, February 10, 1962 (HGL, *pp. 543–45).*

35. To K.S. (Karl Stern), Montreal, February 1962.

I was very happy to hear you had written something about peace. If possible, please send me a copy at once, as I might be able to include it in an anthology of such essays which we are putting out, my publisher and I. We have got a lot of very fine things, and I would like very much to have something of yours. There is a first-class little book that has just come out in England, *Nuclear Weapons and the Christian Conscience*, edited by Walter Stein, which you may know.

In the United States things are by no means hopeful and as you point out it is the Catholics who give evidence of the worst moral insensibility. In a collection of articles on nuclear war presumably from a "religious" point of view, the first breath of religious fresh air, after some fifty pages of pure secularism dressed up in clerical garb, was from a rabbi who finally spoke as if knowing something about the relation of ethics to the holiness of God . . .

I was pleased to hear about the memorial to Fr. Metzger and of your devotion to him. I hear that there has been a plea to Rome for his process to begin and that the plea comes from Jews.

I am reading Jeremias a lot and working on the Old Testament. And last summer I met a wonderful guy from Winnipeg, a Rabbi S. [Zalman Schachter], a fine great Hasid who has become a warm friend. I wish you knew him . . .

36. To J.N. (James Roy Newman), Washington, mid-February 1962.

Cordial thanks for your letter and for the clipping from *The Washington Post*. I think that was one of your best letters and enjoyed it immensely. In return I am sending a modest proposal of my own, which may or may not make the pages of the magazine to which it was sent.

The Rule of Folly contains some excellent things, and above all the dissection of Herman Kahn. Your title is all too literally correct. The way people are working their way up to the most fabulous of all decisions is nothing short of fantastic. It would be unbelievable if anyone wrote it in a novel, before it came to happen. This is to me a source of inexhaustible and disheartening meditations . . .

I am exercised about some of the things that are being said about

"other worlds" sending us messages, a few beeps to teach us their language followed by "the equivalent of a volume of the encyclopedia." Mr. N.—please, for the love of God, tell me how to build a shelter that will protect me from these hurtling volumes of the Encyclopedia Martiana. I am not afraid of fallout, but I am a man of books and I dread of all things these huge volumes. I know how much concentrated frightfulness they can contain and indeed I have contributed to two of them recently. I fear that the Lord is about to punish me in a manner that fits my crime. I am planning an encyclopedia shelter, then, in the woods near here. But don't tell anyone.

I am also evolving a private theory that specially intelligent animals, like seals, dolphins, gorillas, etc., are really the remains of smart civilizations that blew themselves up before us. A few people had the brains to turn into dolphins. If you can tell me how one gets enrolled in the guild of the dolphins, or if you foresee that some new creature is lining up for the future and applications are acceptable . . . I am rather tired of being a human, and would enjoy being a nice, quiet, civilized fish, without political affiliations.

By the way, I got two copies of *The Rule of Folly*. I will pass the extra one along to someone who can profit by it, and am grateful for both.

37. To Z.S. (Rabbi Zalman Schachter), Winnipeg, February 15, 1962 (HGL, *pp. 535–36*).

38. To J.H. (John C. Heidbrink), February 15, 1962 (HGL, *pp. 406–8*).

39. To W.F. (Wilbur H. Ferry), February 17, 1962 (HGL, *p. 208*).

40. To R.L. (Robert Lax), New York, February 16–24, 1962 (RJ, *p. 174*).

41. To S.S. (Rabbi Steven Schwarzschild), Boston, February 24, 1962.

Thanks for your two very good letters. I am happy that Zalman sent you my texts on peace, for they have brought us into contact and have brought me your fine offprints, which I have very much enjoyed. The one on "Speech and Silence before God" is wonderful and very close to my own heart. Thank you for it.

As a matter of fact, I had also read your essay in *Worldview*, the collection of essays on nuclear war, gathered around the rather dubious witness of good Fr. [John Courtney] Murray. I felt that yours was the only voice that really spoke with a full and unequivocally religious note and really was loyal to the holiness of Him who is All Holy. It seemed to me that the others were not listening to His demands, and that from the book as a whole He was absent.

God's absence among religious people, among religious groups, His absence where it is claimed that He is worshipped, is something terrifying today. Or sad in the utter extreme, because it is not His wrath, exactly,

it is His loneliness, His lostness among us. That He waits among us unknown and silent, patiently, for the moment when we will finally destroy Him utterly in His image . . . And leave Him alone again in the empty cosmos.

It is the terrible power that He has given to man, that man can isolate himself and blast himself irrevocably into an outer darkness where he is separated from Him Who is nevertheless everywhere. I cannot believe that this is designed to be irrevocable, but so we are told and so perhaps it is. How can it be? There are dimensions that we are not capable of investigating.

But at any rate let us finally have pity on Him, that we may return to ourselves and have pity on one another.

Certainly I think the unutterable pity of the fate of the Jews in our time is eschatological, and is a manifestation of the loneliness and dejection of God, that He should bring upon Himself so much sorrow and suffer it in His Beloved People. In this He is speaking to us who believe ourselves, in His mercy, to have been adopted into His Chosen People and given, without any merit, the salvation and the joy promised to the Sons of Abraham. But we on the other hand have been without understanding and without pity and have not known that we were only guests invited to the banquet at the last minute.

We have not lived up to our share in the promise and we have not been to Israel, as we were meant to have been, a consolation. It is terrible to see how little we have been that, so little that the irony is almost unbearable. Who notices this?

I am not worthy yet to write about the mystery of Judaism in our world. It is too vast a subject. I wish I could. Maybe someday. If there is anything I say en passant that happens to make sense to you, you can quote it if you like. The article will have to be a thing of the future, if God wills us to have a future on this earth. (I do not doubt that He does, but sometimes the chances are a little disconcerting.)

42. To M.A. (Mother Angela of the Eucharist, O.C.D.), Carmel in Louisville, February 1962.

The issues about civil defense concern not only you but the whole community, and since my opinion has been implicitly asked, I would like to clarify.

Certainly I would think it would be very important for everyone to take any *effective* steps to protect themselves against a nuclear attack and its effects. I suggest that if the Louisville Carmel wants to be protected effectively against nuclear war . . . well, you might move to New Zealand.

Look: the problem is this. An awful lot of poor well-meaning people have been simply "had" by this nonsense about fallout shelters. The ignorance and well-meaning mistakes that have occurred have been monumental. First of all, the estimates of nuclear radiation on which this whole program is based are purely a guess as to *the kind of attack* that

would occur. The estimates of the dangerous radiation have been figured out in terms of a ridiculously small attack, with small bombs. A fallout shelter in Louisville might be of some use if the nearest target hit were, say, Chicago. Perhaps Cleveland. But if Louisville or Fort Knox got hit, then you and we have simply had it. No fallout shelter will be of any use whatever within twenty to fifty miles of a target hit by a big bomb. The H-bomb is an *incendiary* bomb. Fallout is the least of its effects. The fire caused by an H-bomb will not only burn out everything within a radius of twenty to fifty miles or more, depending on the size of the bomb, but will cause firestorms which devour all the oxygen, so that even in a deep fireproof shelter you would smother. If not bake. In Hamburg, in the last war, with ordinary incendiary bombs, people were roasted alive in shelters. This is the brutal truth, and we might as well face it.

Hence if the bomb were to hit anywhere near here a fallout shelter would be useless. The higher in the air the bomb explodes, the wider the range of the fire. If the bomb explodes on the ground then there is more fallout. There is no reason for exploding the bomb on the ground around Louisville (though maybe at Fort Knox). If they wanted to hurt Louisville they would just burn it out with one bomb exploded fairly high up.

An atomic scientist built himself a fallout shelter in California last summer, and what happened? An ordinary brush fire came through and destroyed his house, his garage, and his fallout shelter. Lots of shelters that have been built have caved in or filled with water, etc. I am not saying that a good shelter cannot be had, but the question to be asked is, is this a reasonable expense? A lot of people I know, rather than build shelters, are taking the cost of a shelter and giving it to a fund to build houses for poor people in underdeveloped countries. And so it goes. My own feeling is that it is absolutely against religious poverty to risk money on a thing like that. If it were something everyone could easily have and which could be very effective, then I would say by all means build one. But since it is so risky and precarious and might be totally useless, as well as absurd, I think the best thing is to trust God and wait until we find something that makes a little more sense. This is my opinion, anyway. I have no intention of taking shelter if anything happens. If I am still around after the bomb explodes, and am not blinded completely by it, I will try to help others. That, it seems to me, would be my serious obligation as a priest. Certainly if a nuclear attack takes place, there is going to be terrible confusion and suffering, and though there is every reason for people to take effective steps to survive and try to build up the country afterward, there is also every reason for those who don't give a hoot for survival to go about trying to help those who, like the majority, will be in need of some help in their last hours. This of course for a priest is not a matter of what he feels or thinks about survival, it is just his ordinary duty.

43. To T.T. (Tashi Tshering), Seattle, February–March 1962 (RJ, *p. 320*).

44. To E.S. (Elbert R. Sisson), Maryland, February–March 1962.

Friends have been keeping me supplied with information, and as a result I have seen *Visible Witness* and the King Hall pamphlet, which I have not yet read but which is here. I liked the Young pamphlet very much. I will look into the book you mentioned to which Jerome Wiesner has contributed. It is good to know about him. If I had been aware of him before, I would have asked him for a contribution to a collection of essays I have been getting together, to be published in a paperback by New Directions. Szilard I know of course. What about this organization Szilard is running, for peace?

I wonder if there ought not to be something done to get these various peace movements together in one solid bloc, so to speak.

Certainly it is very important that all the rational and clearheaded opinion which still exists in this country should become articulate and exert force. It would be a tragedy, when so much good has been accomplished and when so much can really be done with the amazing power of science, if the whole thing were to run away with us and if the crazy people were to take over completely. Unfortunately the lack of balance between technology and spiritual life is so enormous that there is every chance of failure and of accident . . .

45. To A.R. (Ad Reinhardt), New York, February–March 1962 (RJ, *p. 279*).

46. To S.E. (Steve Eisner), Detroit, February–March 1962.

Forgive me for waiting so long to acknowledge the book. As a matter of fact, I remember having some correspondence with Raymond Larsson several years ago and had kept track of him from a distance since then. I knew he was still writing, but I had no idea the poems he had done were so fine. It is a splendid book [*Book Like a Bow Curved*], and I congratulate you on it. And of course him also. I will have to get in touch with him, and send him something of my own.

Larsson has used traditional idioms with perfect integrity, and he is certainly a fine poet, underestimated and probably little known, for all I can tell. It is interesting that his sickness has given him a valid and a fruitful kind of distance, protecting him from movements and delusive fashions. More power to him. This is fine poetry, from a noble person.

Of course I knew Bro. Antoninus' book put out by your press [University of Detroit Press]. In fact I think the program of the press sounds very good, and can only encourage you with all my heart.

Of course too, I thank you for writing. I am not one who believes that a man has to show his religious party card before one can speak to him. And I am well aware that there are plenty of people who shy away from religion and its institutional aspect precisely because of a certain