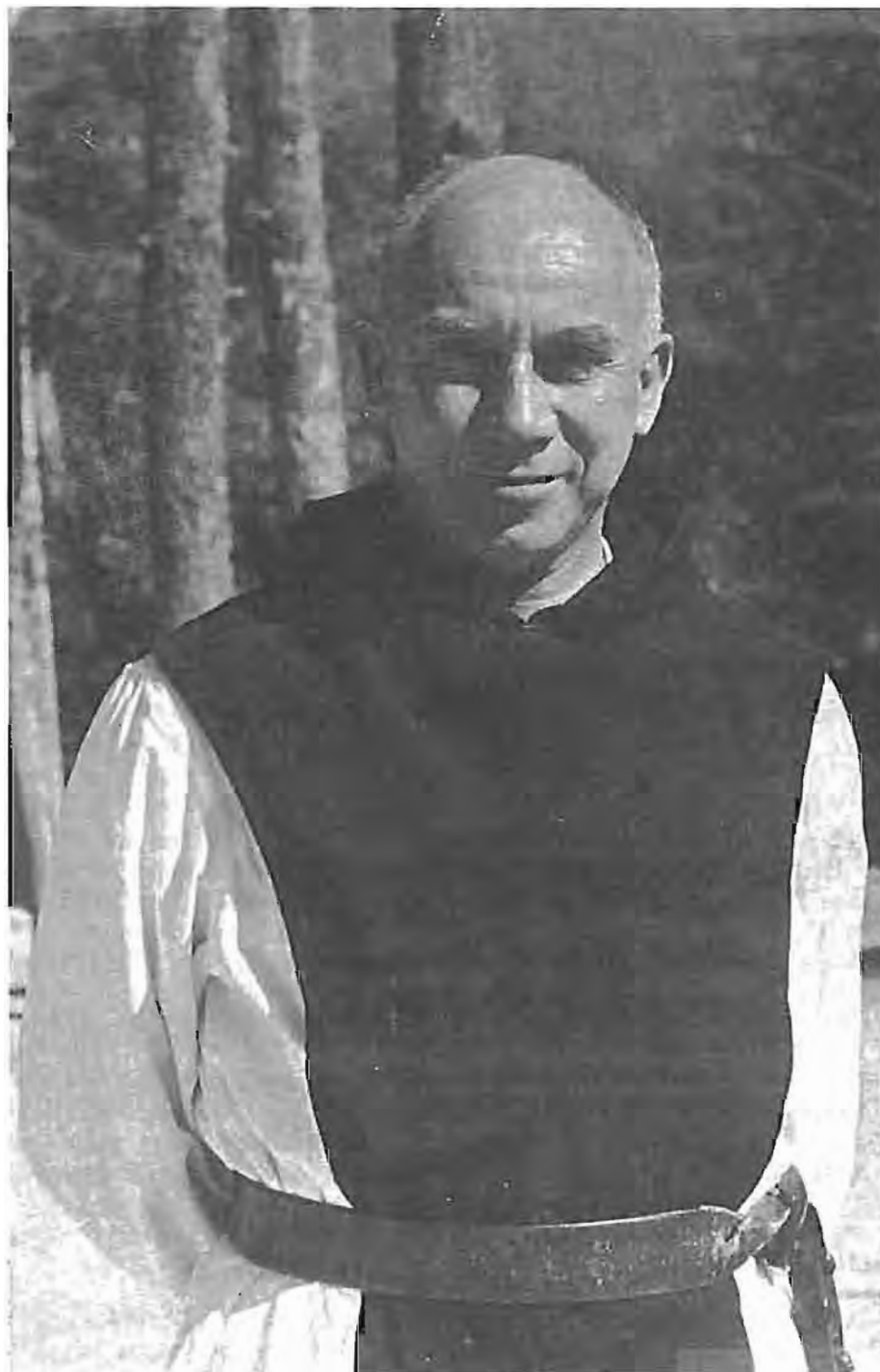


# THE Round Table

SUMMER  
1988

"...a path from where we are to where we should be." --Peter Maurin



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# WHY THIS ISSUE?



In all of Thomas Merton's writings one thing consistently jumps out at the reader: the man was very human. In pictures where he stands at the door of his hermitage, facing the camera with his warm smile and inviting eyes, I imagine that shortly after the photo was snapped he probably tripped over a tree root or something; then, of course, laughed and made some wry comment. I have always sensed that he would be a very easy person to talk to. Judging from the numbers and variety of people who trekked up to Gethsemani to do just that, from Joan Baez to Jacques Maritain, it must have been a universal sentiment. And I admit, I don't swallow him whole. Sometimes I want to say to him, "Aw, come off it" — when, for example, he would invite everyone up to see him and then complain that he had too many visitors. But that is exactly how we relate to our close friends: we don't idolize them, we know their strengths and their weaknesses, but most of all we love them.

Twenty years after his death in December, 1968, Thomas Merton is still a very loved man and a dear friend of the Catholic Worker. We love him because he wrote with such grace and vision about God's love for us, and human injustices, and how to live as a believer in our oppressively pagan culture. He also touched us with his honesty and humor about his own struggle to be a person of faith. Like a lot of us lost souls in the materially over-developed first world, Merton had to grope his way to God. He had his battle scars, his psychic wounds. Unlike a lot of us, he took what was common, our human frailty, and transformed it into communion.

We love him also because he set aside everything to follow Christ. There are some people who seek the truth about themselves and about life so single-mindedly that they can't jump through the conventional hoops or adopt the standard labels. Instead they end up in strange places doing unusual things. Dorothy Day in the bowery handing out bowls of soup and Thomas Merton in the secluded hills of Kentucky chanting the office were pursuing the same insistent call. The spirit blows where it wills and we never know where it's going or from where it comes.

In his article, Pat Coy compares the lives of Day and Merton, revealing the many parallels between them even though outwardly their faith took very different forms. Tom Nelson, C.M., relates Merton's thought on violence and war as the betrayal of our humanness. Mary Luke Tobin, S.L., reflects upon Merton's faith as the root of his political and personal action, the center from which he spoke with a prophetic voice. We include a time-line of Merton's life to illustrate his remarkable journey in faith, and a few of his poems. Following the house articles, Barb Prosser writes a fitting "Round Table Talk" reflecting on the struggle to remain true to the best in each other. Our foreign correspondent and much missed community member, Ann Manganaro, S.L., offers a heart-wrenching report from El Salvador. In this issue, which marks the twentieth anniversary of Thomas Merton's death, we hope to allow him to touch you once again with his joy in our common humanity and his abiding faith in God.

† — Ellen Rehg

*Cover photo graciously provided by Brother Patrick Hart, Abbey of Gethsemani.*

*All art work in the first half of this issue is by Thomas Merton.*

## *the St. Louis Catholic Worker Community*

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# MERTON: FAITH-CENTERED AND PROPHETIC

by Mary Luke Tobin, S.L.

Anyone studying the life and thought of Thomas Merton is probably struck by his insistence on a faith-basis for all activity directed toward a world of wholeness and peace. Merton considered the oneness of humanity as God's creative gift, and divisiveness as an ignoring or shunning of this reality.

In my reading of Merton, I find this theme consistently woven throughout his work. Perhaps his ability to communicate such insights was never more powerful than in his relating a vivid experience as he walked on the streets of Louisville: "I was suddenly overwhelmed with the realization that I loved all these people, that they were mine and I theirs, that we could not be alien to one another even though we were total strangers. It was like waking from a dream of separateness. . . ."

Merton saw personal and community identity as flowing from the life of faith, and the integrity of one's actions for peace as a clear outcome of this insight:

"When everything is taken away, you can still be free, and that is true freedom. It is good sometimes to have everything taken away so that we are 'forced' into this freedom. Most of us have to be 'forced.' This freedom comes only with

grace and the nearness of God. God is identified with our inner self which remains even if everything is taken away. 'Everything' can be gone, but God is in our 'center' and that center is all that is left when we die."

I had the good fortune to be present at a retreat of a few days in 1968, to which Merton had invited a group of contemplative prioresses. He was at ease with these religious leaders, for he understood their lives and dilemmas in an age of dramatic change. He encouraged them to take their own lives in hand, making their own choices, in the clear consciousness that they, better than anyone else, knew what they wanted as contemplatives. They were ready for this affirmation and responded happily to Merton's liberating promptings.

As was typical in Merton's writings and conversations, he was working out his own approach to the times, fitting the perplexing questions of the twentieth century into a deep faith tradition. The skill and originality he brought to this search were a strengthening support to his audience.

In a letter to Jean LeClercq, French monastic author, he wrote, "The purpose of the monastic life is not survival, but prophecy." It was indeed the prophetic that engaged Merton during many of his

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*Mary Luke Tobin was a friend and neighbor to Thomas Merton in Kentucky for many years. She was also the sole woman observer at Vatican II. She now lives in Denver, where she is coordinator of the Thomas Merton Studies Center.*

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last reflections. He felt we were living in profoundly prophetic times, largely because of the nuclear shadow, and was convinced that the monastic life could serve the world prophetically in our century.

Merton had mulled over the great Scriptural prophetic passages, and found that some of their warnings would be applicable to the traumatic events of the twentieth century. He reflected:

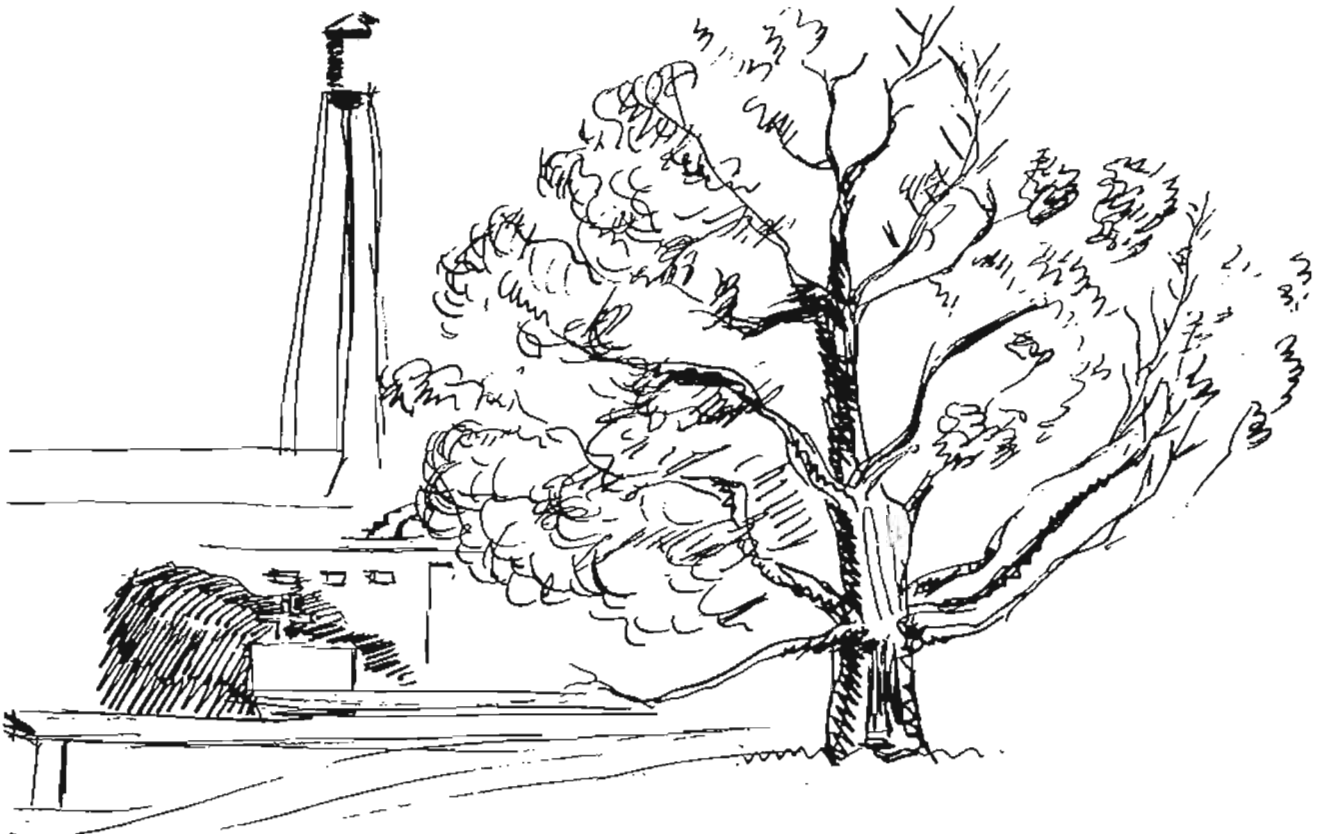
Abraham starts out. What's the first thing that happens to him? "Leave thy people." You have to get out of a certain kind of society. Put yourself in the hands of God, and then go on from there. All through the Old Testament, you've got the same thing. Moses and the chosen people — you've got to get out of Egypt. You've got to get out of this Egyptian structure. Egypt was not an immoral country or anything like that. It wasn't necessarily worse than any other country. But they had to get out because they weren't free. You see, it's because they were told what to do. Somebody else determined their lives entirely for them. Now the word that we have to think of in connection with this is the word ALIENATION.

Merton read contemporary authors avidly to catch clues from the serious thinkers

of our times. In the late '60's his reading included Camus, Faulkner, and Herbert Marcuse. He concurred with the latter and other Marxist writers that alienation — a separation of oneself from one's work, activity, etc. — was causing problems in our times.

Although Merton commented that some of the theories and speculations of contemporary intellectuals were naive and hollow, he also thought that Christians could learn much from the sharp perceptions of some of these agnostic thinkers. Marcuse, for example, tells us that our society gives you enough rewards so that you are happy to be alienated. You will settle for an alienated life provided that you get the kind of rewards that society offers, that is, provided that you get your car and your TV and your house and enough comforts. You're happy. And you'll settle for that.

The prophetic examples considered by Merton included those who had broken with alienation — Elias, St. Francis, and John the Baptist, for instance. In each of these examples, Merton sees that "there is some essential break along the line, so that you are free, so that you are really making a choice from your own deepest center, and you are not making a choice as



pre-determined by somebody else."

Merton said, "The prophet is one who rocks the boat, not by telling slaves to be free, but by telling people who think they're free that they're slaves. That's the unacceptable message. There's nothing terribly new about getting out and telling black people that they are having a rough time. The prophetic thing in this country is to tell white people that they're not free. And then the more prophetic thing in this country is to tell white people that they need black people to be free, so they'll be liberated themselves. And few people say this."

Merton is telling us that the life of prophecy for the individual and for the community demands a willingness to seek the truth in faith and to make choices accordingly. One does not look to Merton to provide answers, but to encourage us to recognize deceptions and to remove them from our vision, pressing on in the spirit of the prophets. Because he saw the importance of a healthy vision of reality, he considered a recognition of alienation a first step toward more faith-centered action.

Merton kept on struggling to see how the individual and community could truly

become prophetic. He wanted us to clarify our choices, to continue to see that by searching for truth in our own lives and situations, we are in a far better position to recommend prophetic action to others. Merton himself was careful not to prescribe specific courses of action; he never condemned the simple, nor lay guilt trips on individuals. He was only too aware that he could not recommend to others courses of action of which he himself was uncertain.

I think that what Merton proposed in 1968 is even more pressing for us in 1988. If we can become aware of the prevailing alienation in our own lives and institutions, we will be readier to formulate more faithful action. I think we can sum up Merton's recommendations from the late '60's in three basic steps:

1. Awareness of the hidden presence of alienating factors in our total environment, both in church and state.

2. Choosing from "the center," making decisions governed by one's own carefully monitored values.

3. Acting from "the center," bringing the course we have selected into a sometimes harsh reality, but a reality permeated by our faith in God.

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## CHEESE

I think that we should never freeze  
Such lively assets as our cheese.

The sucker's hungry mouth is pressed  
Against the cheese's caraway breast,

A cheese, whose scent like sweet perfume  
Pervades the house through every room.

A cheese that may at Christmas wear  
A suit of cellophane underwear,

Upon whose bosom is a label,  
Whose habitat: -- The Tower of Babel.

Poems are nought but warmed-up breeze,  
DOLLARS are made by Trappist Cheese.

- Thomas Merton

# DOROTHY DAY & THOMAS MERTON: LIVING ON THE MARGINS

by Patrick G. Coy

Thomas Merton and Catholic Worker co-founder Dorothy Day viewed society from its margins. Central to Merton's self-understanding was his call to the monastery. Though it is a vocation the world values little, it was the prism through which Merton viewed and interpreted the world. He remarked often that on society's terms the monk is a "useless character." Borrowing a phrase from the American Marxist theorist, Herbert Marcuse, Merton referred to himself as a "marginal man." When the feminist theologian Rosemary Radford Ruether wrote him advising that his views on social issues should logically lead him to abandon the monastery and jump into the "real" world to do battle with the principalities and powers, Merton flatly rejected such an approach. "I am certainly quite definite," he wrote her in reply, "about wanting to stay in the bushes, provided I can make some sort of noises that will reach my offbeat friends."

Similarly, Dorothy Day saw the world through the lens of her own vocation on the margins: dedicated service to and solidarity with the poor and oppressed. She interpreted reality through the eyes of the poor, those relegated involuntarily to society's economic, political, and social margins.

Though their respective vocational choices and consequent geographic locations were vastly different — one removed

from the trappings of the world, the other immersed in it side by side with its victims — the result was the same for each. They were gifted to view social developments with a Gospel-based, critical attitude. When Merton met some French Marxist students at Santa Barbara on the first leg of his fateful Asian pilgrimage of 1968, after considerable cajoling, he finally proclaimed them monks in their own way. "The monk," this most famous monk explained, "is essentially someone who takes a critical attitude toward the contemporary world and its structures."

Merton frequently indicated that living on the margins with a critical attitude was a Christian, not just a monk's, vocation. Standing aside, refusing to acquiesce to the march of "progress," and living an alternative life as both he and Day did so well requires faith — a faith not in society's structures, and further still not in one's self, but in the One who called them to this life.

Fidelity to their vocations did not come easily. Both of them stayed on the margins in and through prayer. It was their devotion to daily, soul-searching prayer, where they came to know of both the beauty and the beast in the human spirit and of God's unconditional, forgiving love, which nurtured their critically constructive attitude toward the world.

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*Pat Coy, member at Karen House, recently announced his engagement to Karin Tanquist, who is a good friend of the community.*



Both loved the psalter, and prayed it daily for the knowledge of self and God it gave them. As Merton put it, "Our identity is hidden in the Psalms." The last years of both of their lives were spent steeped in prayer. Three years before his untimely death, Merton moved to his solitary hermitage on Gethsamani's back lot, and when Day's health began to fail seriously in 1976, her last four years were spent in her room at Maryhouse. As she explained it in *THE CATHOLIC WORKER*, "My job now is prayer."

But long before these two contemporaries came together in prayerful common cause, their lives evinced uncanny similarities. It was as if God had laid down parallel tracks of formation upon which each would traverse the spiritual wilderness.

In their younger years both were political leftists whose hearts were somewhat hardened against organized religion. Day carried an Industrial Workers of the World (Wobblies) union card, worked for the Anti-Imperialist League (a Communist Party affiliate) in support of Nicaragua's revolutionary leader Sandino, and wrote for the *MASSES*, the *NEW MASSES*, the socialist daily *CALL*, and the Chicago Communist Party paper the *LIBERATOR*. For his part, Merton only flirted with the traditional left. He did seriously entertain joining the Communist Party in 1933-34 while at Cambridge, and later joined the Young Communist League at Columbia in 1935, though his commitment and interest levels were highly dubious

and qualified, not to mention short-lived. But even after their respective conversions to Catholic Christianity, both Day and Merton maintained a distanced and conditional, yet real respect for some of the insights of Marxist social analysis. There are many examples, but one need only read Day's writing from Cuba, and Merton's dialogues from Calcutta and his last talk, delivered in Thailand, entitled "Marxism and Monastic Perspective," to realize this.

Each went through a profound conversion to Jesus Christ and for both it brought radical upheavals which permanently upset their old ways. But long before their conversions, both had a propensity to spend quiet time in Catholic churches, long hours known only to themselves, and hours they had difficulty explaining and understanding.

The mysterious beauty of the Church's traditions held for them a strange and elusive attraction. Patiently nursing them with the rich milk of a tradition holding transcendental truths, the Church delivered comfort and solace to their troubled spirits. If it was hard for them to understand or articulate at the time, it held them securely in its grasp none the less. Progressive on social and political grounds, they were both marked by a strong dose of traditionalism when it came to certain dimensions of the Church. But this was a creative sort of tension, one that would prove both troublesome and fruitful throughout their lives, not only for them, but for the Church as well.



When they were young, they each walked away from parenthood. Merton, in the form of a lover and son that he left behind in England when he beat a less than honorable retreat from Cambridge; and Day when she had an abortion in a misguided and futile attempt to keep a lover. These two events were but symbols of larger patterns of behavior in their respective lives. These events and behavior patterns elicited considerable remorse from Day and Merton, and they would eventually figure prominently in what was the central dimension of each one's conversion experience: being loved and forgiven by a compassionate, gracious God.

Heeding God's call cost each dearly and dramatically. Day left a common law husband she loved deeply and a shared way



of life with Forster on Staten Island's beach that she found satisfying and stimulating. The religious irony here is unbearably real. It was that very life with Forster, a life rooted in the rhythms of the sea and the mysteries of creation that, along with the birth of her daughter Tamar, caused the religious reawakening of Dorothy Day. That which originally called her to God she was later called to leave behind.

When Merton entered the monastery he abandoned self to God. At the time he understood that to mean giving up what he

held most precious, that which was central to his self-understanding: his writing. It brought him the greatest joy and meaning, yet he felt moved to give it up and over to God, for while it brought him closer to God, he felt it also pulled him away. Fortunately, early on in Merton's monastic career his superiors recognized the central place writing occupied in his religious identity, and he was encouraged to accept it and use it as the gift from God that it was. Both Merton and Day were willing to pay what Bonhoeffer called the "cost of discipleship." It was a willingness we can all learn from, one so profound as to be translated with time into prophetic witness.

These two converts went on to convert the Church they loved so passionately. Through their lives and remarkably copious writings, they nudged, cajoled, and eventually moved the Church closer to the full Gospel message of love, justice, and peace.

These two converts, both of whom chose to live in austere, demanding communities on society's margins, where simple labor and voluntary poverty were part of both the Cisterian and Catholic Worker ideal, became the alternative U.S. Catholicism could offer a consumeristic culture. These two converts, who eschewed the relentless march of technology and its consequent desecration of the earth and human personhood, became U.S. Catholicism's most lucid answer to the twentieth century. These two converts, whose initial forays into the peace issue were greeted with parallel rebuffs by others in the Church (Merton was told to return to prayer and his writings on the "spiritual life;" Day was dismissed as naive, and counseled to return to the soup kitchen and her writings about the poor), were later to play important roles in the development of the Vatican II teachings on war and peace contained in the councillor document, GUADIM ET SPES.

Responding to a solicitation from International Fellowship of Reconciliation staffers Jean and Hildegard Goss-Mayr, and with the surprising approval of his abbot, Merton stuffed three envelopes of his writings on the war and peace question and sent them to the Goss-Mayrs who distributed them in Rome to the bishops and theologians preparing the document.

For her part, Day participated in a woman's fast in Rome in support of a strong conciliar statement on peace. She



also had Kileen Egan edit a special edition of THE CATHOLIC WORKER which was devoted to the immorality of nuclear deterrence, and had it mailed to every bishop of the world previous to the discussions on the council floor. Their efforts, coupled with those of many others, resulted in the only condemnation issued by the council — against the use of nuclear weapons.

Much later, in 1983, Day would of course be named in the U.S. bishops peace pastoral, along with Gandhi and Martin Luther King, as an exemplar of the viability of Christian nonviolence. The bishops called her one "who has had a profound impact upon the life of the church in the United States."

The spiritualities of Day and the later Merton managed to bridge the frequent dualisms that have marked so much of the Christian spiritual tradition. In the end, they gave scant heed to any simplistic split between the material and the spiritual, or between the political and the religious. Their witness was heard because their spiritualities transcended these common pitfalls and sounded a clear note of truth. Both were marked by a deeply incarnational approach to reality.

"We have to leap into faith through the senses — from the natural to the supernatural — and I was drawn to the church in my youth because it appealed to the senses," wrote Day in a preface to Brother Lawrence's THE PRACTICE OF THE PRESENCE OF GOD. The genius of Day's spirituality is that she discerned the hand of a living God in the most ordinary of objects, events, and people. The Spirit of God had not only troubled the waters and called forth life in the beginning, but the divine lot had been definitively cast in and with the world, in the person of Jesus Christ.

Merton shared this approach. While he vociferously condemned the false illusions of the modern world which ensnare so many, he also came to love and appreciate the world for its beauty, and the rare look into the face of God it could provide. This was true no matter the creative hat he was wearing, whether it be that of artist, poet, photographer, or essayist. In each medium this Renaissance man celebrated the natural world, portraying the ordinary -- the sight of a falling leaf; the sound of rain drops on his hermitage roof; a lonely, unoccupied



chair; or the sound of his own sneakered footsteps while making the rounds of the fire watch late at night in the sleeping monastery — all of these were portrayed by pen, brush, or shutter in such a way as to reveal the extraordinary in the ordinary.

This incarnational approach was so strong in both that the doctrine of the Mystical Body of Christ was at the heart of their respective theologies. At the opening of the Merton Center at Bellarmine College, Merton's written remarks included this summation of his life: "Whatever I may have written, I think in the end it can be reduced to this one truth: that God calls human persons to union with God and with one another in Christ, in the Church, which is his Mystical Body."



Similarly, Day often said that the truth of the Mystical Body of Christ doctrine was a foundation which anchored the personalism of the Catholic Worker movement.

But while they were immanently concrete and incarnational, these two were also hopelessly in love with the mystical. Indeed, though their intentions were good, springing from their love of the mystics, they each reserved their worst writing for a poorly received book on a Christian mystic. They shared an attraction for the Carmelite mystics, Sts. John of the Cross

and Theresa of Avila, and especially for the Little Flower, St. Therese of Lisieux. The lives of the saints informed their own lives and each took to heart the Pauline injunction that we are all called to be saints. In fact, they took it so to heart that in due time they will very likely both be sainted.

The lives of Merton and Day were inextricably bound up together. Though they never met, they were both prolific letter writers who treasured their correspondence with each other. They took great solace and comfort from the other's presence in the Church they loved so dearly. Solace indeed, for in 1965 Merton wrote, "If there were no CATHOLIC WORKER and such forms of witness, I would never have joined the Catholic Church." In the early and mid-nineteen sixties, many of Merton's most important writings on social issues first appeared in the pages of THE CATHOLIC WORKER, further cementing their close association.

When Dorothy Day died in November of 1980, historian David O'Brien, writing in AMERICA, called her "the most significant, interesting and influential person in the history of U.S. Catholicism." NEWSWEEK described her as "perhaps the most influential U.S. Catholic of her time." Change the gender in these descriptions and they could also be obituaries for Thomas Merton. When he died twelve years previous, many Merton memorials did, in fact, read hauntingly similar to these.

Through their lives and prophetic witness, we have been blessed with a great grace. They have given us an approach to the spiritual life that resonates with Pope John Paul's definition of a healthy, alive spirituality, one which "deepens religious experience and hope-filled prophetic activity." In his talks in Calcutta, Merton described the role of the monk — those who live at the margins like he and Day — as "keeping the way open for modern technological men and women to recover the integrity of their own inner depths."

Thomas Merton and Dorothy Day have not only kept that way open, they have opened it wider for those willing to follow. Deo Gratias.



# MERTON'S LETTERS TO DOROTHY DAY

August 17, 1960

We should in a way fear for our perseverance because there is a big hole in us, an abyss and we have to fall through it into emptiness, but the Lord will catch us. Who can fall through the center of himself into that nothingness and not be appalled? But the Lord will catch us. He will catch you without fail and take you to His Heart. Because of the PRAYERS OF THE POOR. You are the richest woman in America spiritually, with such prayers behind you. You cannot fail even if you try to. The mighty prayers of the poor will embrace you with invincible strength and mercy and bear you in spite of everything into the Heart of God. Those prayers are His own arms. I have immense faith in the prayers of the poor: ask them for me too please. God bless you, in Christ . . .



December 29, 1965

. . . To me THE CATHOLIC WORKER stands for something absolutely unique and alive in the American Church. It would be hard to put into words how much it means to me, for so many personal reasons: it stands for my own youth and for the kind of influences that shaped my own life thirty years ago. . . . CW stands for so much that has always been meaningful to me: I associate it with similar trends of thought, like that of the English Dominicans and Eric Gill, who also were very

important to me. And Maritain. And so on. CATHOLIC WORKER is part of my life, Dorothy. I am sure the world is full of people who would say the same. . . . If there were no CATHOLIC WORKER and such forms of witness, I would never have joined the Catholic Church.

April 9, 1962

And so here we are in the middle of the mystery of the Passion. Our Lord has certainly had to do it all by Himself. We have not been much help to Him, ever, and perhaps we cannot be. And now with this tremendous destructive power, and with our incapacity to handle it, and our inability to think straight, and our best efforts going astray; it would be sad and discouraging, if we did not remember that the Cross itself is the sign of victory. But victory is one thing and "success," in the dimensions familiar to us, is quite another. You are so right about prayer being the main thing: it is the realm that cannot be closed to us and cannot be got at. There we are strongest because we are frankly centered in our helplessness and in His power, not obsessed with fictions and trivialities . . .

February 9, 1967

Thanks so much for your good note of January 29th. I have read your piece in the latest CW on Cardinal Spellman and the war. It is beautifully done, soft-toned and restrained, and speaks of love more than of reproof. It is the way a Christian should speak up, and we can all be grateful to you for speaking in this way. It HAS to be done. The moral insensitivity of those in authority, on certain points so utterly crucial for humanity and for the Church, has to be pointed out and if possible dispelled. It does not imply that we ourselves are perfect or infallible. But what is a Church after all but a community in which truth is shared, not a monopoly that dispenses it from the top down. Light travels on a two-way street in our Church: or I hope it does . . .

*Reprinted from THE HIDDEN GROUND OF LOVE: THE LETTERS OF THOMAS MERTON, ed. by William H. Shannon.*

# THREE POEMS

BY THOMAS MERTON

## "WHEN IN THE SOUL OF THE SERENE DISCIPLE..."

When in the soul of the serene disciple  
With no more Fathers to imitate  
Poverty is a success,  
It is a small thing to say the roof is gone:  
He has not even a house.

Stars, as well as friends,  
Are angry with the noble ruin.  
Saints depart in several directions.

Be still:  
There is no longer any need of comment;  
It was a lucky wind  
That blew away his halo with his cares,  
A lucky sea that drowned his reputation.

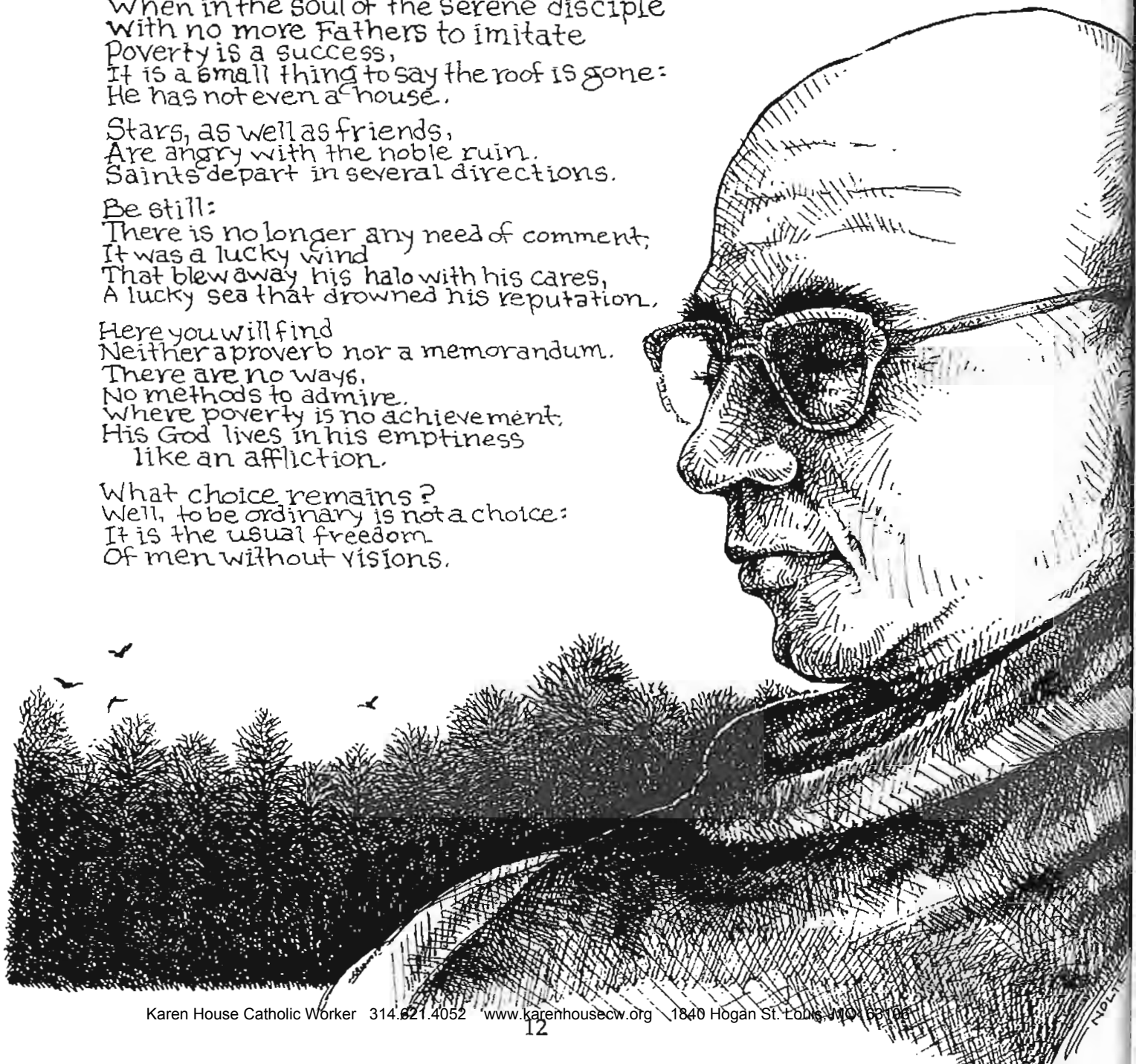
Here you will find  
Neither a proverb nor a memorandum.  
There are no ways,  
No methods to admire.  
Where poverty is no achievement,  
His God lives in his emptiness  
like an affliction.

What choice remains?  
Well, to be ordinary is not a choice:  
It is the usual freedom  
Of men without visions.

## WISDOM

I studied it and it taught  
I learned it and soon forgot  
Having forgotten I was  
The insupportable knowledge

How sweet my life was  
Wisdom is well known  
When it is no longer  
Only then is understood



And me nothing.  
Got everything else:  
Burdened with knowledge-  
ledge of nothing;  
I be if I were wise!  
en or thought of,  
nding bearable,

## FOR MY BROTHER: REPORTED MISSING IN ACTION, 1943

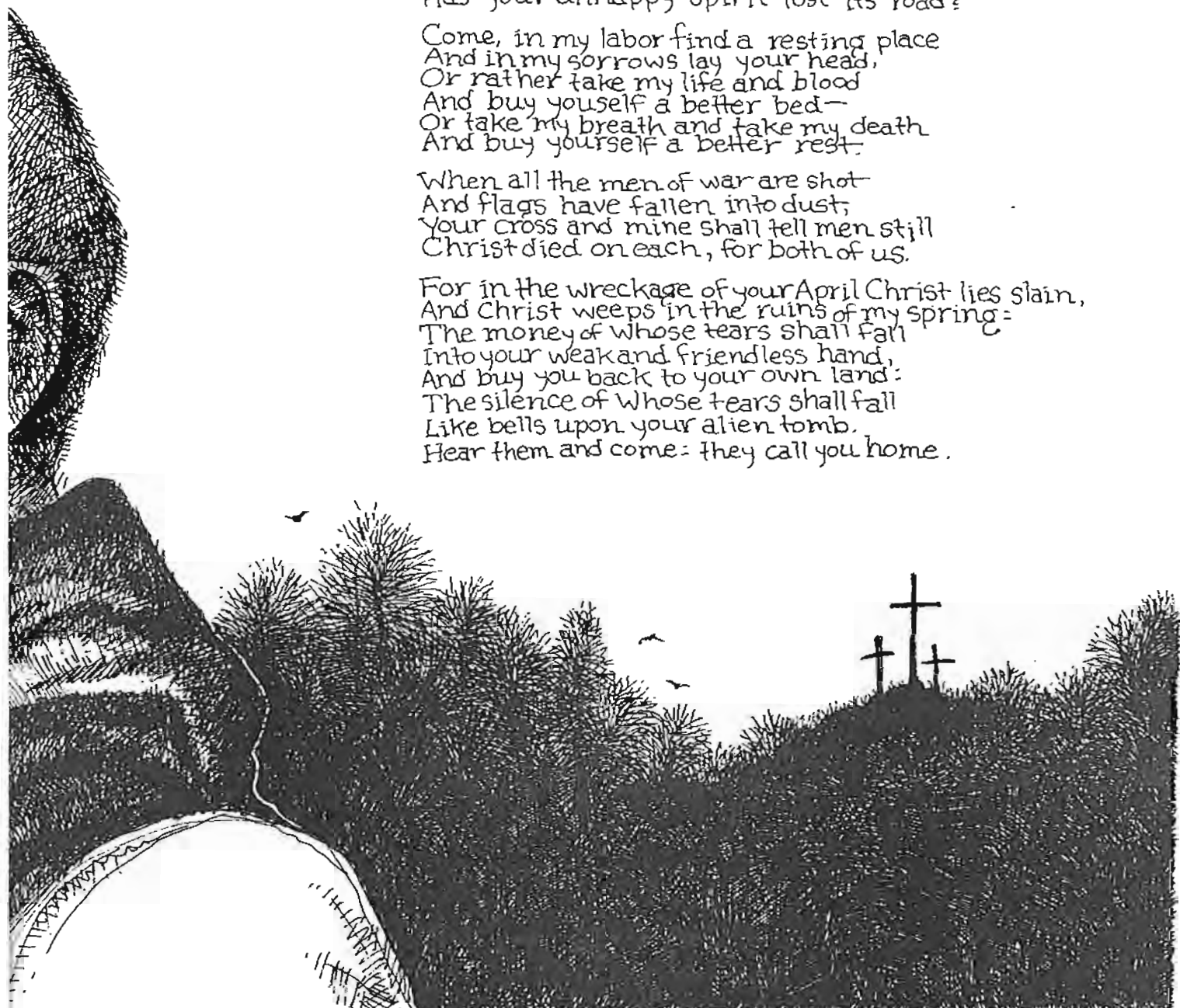
Sweet brother, if I do not sleep  
My eyes are flowers for your tomb;  
And if I can not eat my bread,  
My fasts shall live like willows where you died.  
If in the heat I find no water for my thirst,  
My thirst shall turn to springs for you, poor traveler.

Where, in what desolate and smoky country,  
Lies your poor body, lost and dead?  
And in what landscape of disaster  
Has your unhappy spirit lost its road?

Come, in my labor find a resting place  
And in my sorrows lay your head,  
Or rather take my life and blood  
And buy yourself a better bed—  
Or take my breath and take my death  
And buy yourself a better rest.

When all the men of war are shot  
And flags have fallen into dust,  
Your cross and mine shall tell men still  
Christ died on each, for both of us.

For in the wreckage of your April Christ lies slain,  
And Christ weeps in the ruins of my spring:  
The money of whose tears shall fall  
Into your weak and friendless hand,  
And buy you back to your own land:  
The silence of whose tears shall fall  
Like bells upon your alien tomb.  
Hear them and come: they call you home.



Jan. 13, 1915

Birth in Prades, France.

1934

Enrolls in Columbia Univ. as an UG.

1936

Enters the graduate English program at Columbia. He chooses Wm. Blake as topic of his Master's thesis.

Nov. 16, 1938

His reading a life of the Jesuit poet G.M. Hopkins crystallizes into a conversion experience and he is baptized into the Catholic Church.

1941

Enters the Trappist monastery of Our Lady of Gethsemani in Kentucky.

1948

Publication of THE SEVEN STOREY MOUNTAIN.

1949

SEEDS OF CONTEMPLATION

May 26,

Ordained as Fr. Louis, O.C.S.O.

1953

THE SIGN OF JONAS

1964

Travels to N.Y. city for the first time since entering Gethsemani, to visit with Japanese Zen Buddhist scholar D.T. Suzuki.

Leads retreat on "The Spiritual Roots of Protest" at Gethsemani; among those participating are the Berrigan brothers.

1965

Moves into "the hermitage" full-time.  
THE WAY OF CHUANG TZU.

Oct.

At the request of former novice, Ernesto Cardenal, asks for permission to transfer to Solentiname, Nicaragua. Nothing comes of the request.

Nov.

Self-immolation of Roger LaPorte, occasional volunteer at N.Y. CW, protesting Indochina War leads an alarmed Merton to withdraw, for a time, his name from the list of Catholic Peace Fellowship sponsors. Informs

## A LIFE'S LINE

Feb. 1959

Dorothy Day reads THE SEVEN STOREY MOUNTAIN and remarks that Merton had "plunged himself so deeply in religion that his view of the world and its problems is superficial and scornful."

1961

"The Shelter Ethic," an essay, marks his first published critique of nuclear weapons.

1962

Sends letters of support to Dorothy Day and Jim Forest for the nonviolent peace strike organized by CW. Letter to Forest is printed in the Feb. 1962 CW. Personal correspondence between Merton and Day reflect their concerns about the future of the movement.

ORIGINAL CHILD BOMB.

Beginning of PAX in U.S., sponsored by Day and Merton (future Pax Christi).

1963

"Letters to a White Liberal" marks first published critique of racism and the civil rights movement.

Forest and Day of withdrawal. They respond moderately, but find his action painful.

1966

CONJECTURES OF A GUILTY BYSTANDER

March

Operation on vertebrae of neck. During convalescence he discovers and enjoys the music of Bob Dylan.

Begins a long and searching intellectual discussion through correspondence with Rosemary Radford Ruether which continues nearly up to his death.

1967

Abbot Dom James Fox resigns and is replaced by Fr. Flavian Burns, an old student of Merton's.

1968

Sets off for journey to the East by way of Calcutta, Indonesia, Hong Kong. Is saddened to learn that Richard Nixon was elected President.

Dec.

Dies tragically in Bangkok, Thailand.

# THE DIGNITY OF WEAKNESS

by Tom Nelson, C.M.

In 1962 Thomas Merton wrote an essay on selections from the writings of Clement of Alexandria (d.211A.D.). At the time, the United States was experiencing the struggle for human dignity in two ways. At home, the moral issue of the dignity of the human person was at stake in the civil rights movement. Abroad, the moral issue of the dignity of the human person was equally at stake in the war in Southeast Asia. Twenty-five years later the struggle for human rights and dignity continues, and the visions of Thomas Merton and Clement of Alexandria are as relevant in 1988 as they were in 1962 and 200 A.D.

It is worthwhile to emphasize Clement's belief that the Christian exercises a presence for peace in a world of violence and war. He presents an image of the Christian as a "soldier of peace" who is armed with the weapon of the Word: the Spirit of Truth. "The Christian is a soldier of peace in an army that sheds no blood..." (THE PROTREPTIKOS, V). The Christian defends the faith not with human weapons but with the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God. This Pauline metaphor has become diluted after nineteen hundred years of repetition, but we must strive to recover its original freshness and meaning: that truth itself is our strength and our weapon!

Thomas Merton observes that Christians have disarmed themselves of the sword of truth and taken up the sword of metal:

...We have come to believe that truth and justice so badly need to be defended by us that, without our recourse to violence, truth cannot survive in the world...

In proportion as we rely on material arms, we tend to become separated from the purity of this truth. Not that our intellects do not continue to function correctly — but an inner, spiritual grasp of divine truth in its fullness will necessarily be lacking to the one who solves problems by force and not by love...

Such a person no longer really believes in the power of truth to defend itself in them. They on the contrary defend the truth as something smaller and weaker than oneself.

For Merton the root of war is fear. He approached this for the first time in the collection of essays entitled SEEDS OF CONTEMPLATION (1949) and again in an entirely new way in the collection NEW SEEDS OF CONTEMPLATION (1961), also printed in THE CATHOLIC WORKER (October 1961). This fear is rooted in our lack of trust:

At the root of all war is fear: not so much the fear people have of one another as the fear they have of everything. It is not merely that they do not trust one another, they do not even trust themselves. If they are not sure when someone else may turn around

*Tom Nelson, a Vincentian priest recently returned from Kenya, is a regular celebrant and participant at our Tuesday night liturgies. He lived at Gethsemani for one year and is currently working on a Merton bibliography.*





and kill them, they are still less sure when they may turn around and kill themselves. They cannot trust anything / anyone, because they have ceased to believe in God... (NEW SEEDS OF CONTEMPLATION, 112)

Because we do not believe in God we do not trust in the power of God and so must take up the sword to defend our vision of the truth.

It is not only our mistrust and hatred of others that is dangerous but also and above all our hatred and mistrust of ourselves; particularly that hatred of ourselves which is too deep and too powerful to be consciously faced. For it is this which makes us see our own evil and weakness in others and unable to see it in ourselves. It is easy to identify the sin with the sinner when it is someone other than ourselves. In ourselves, it is the other way around; we see the sin, but

we have difficulty in accepting responsibility for it.

Yet is precisely in our experience of our own weakness that the power of God has the possibility of being present in us. In as much as we deny our weakness we diminish the presence of the power of truth in our lives and arm ourselves with the weapons of war. In as much as we accept our weakness (and accept the responsibility for how we live out of it) we allow the power of Truth to defend us.

The prophetic voices which proclaim the truth of justice to us today enable us to discover our own weakness. Whose are these voices? One of them is the cry of the poor proclaiming a call to justice. It is their cry to us — and our listening to that cry — which will save us from the journey our fears of ourselves and others have chartered for us. Communion and solidarity are realized only in recognizing and accepting our own weakness and that of the other person as the common ground on which communion is shared — in Truth — because that is the place where the Truth of our lives can defend us.

Merton writes in an Easter homily from 1967 about the dignity of human weakness as the ground of solidarity, communion, and power:

...We have been called to share in the resurrection, not because we have kept all the laws of God and humans, not because we are religious heroes, but because we are suffering and struggling human beings. Sinners fighting for our lives, prisoners fighting for freedom, rebels taking up spiritual weapons to fight against the powers that degrade and insult our human dignity. If we had been able to win the battle for freedom without him, Christ would not have come. But he has come, to gather us together around him in the battle for freedom. The fact that we have been wounded in the fight or the fact that we may have spent most of the time so far running away from the battle makes no difference now. He is with us. He is risen. (Easter Homily, 1967)

Let's continue to remember one another at the tables of communion at which we sit, asking for the courage we need to follow the vision the Gospel places before us. For by faithfully struggling to follow it, we allow ourselves to be transformed by it, into the likeness of the image in which God made us: the mind and heart of Christ.



## AFTER THE DEATHS OF DOROTHY DAY AND THOMAS MERTON, THE BISHOPS SPOKE FOR PEACE

Everywhere words stopped short  
in a wrong wind.  
You could panic, you could cry peace  
till your face turned black  
the wind a noose at your throat—  
The world went its way, marched away.

Dorothy, Thomas, this was their history—  
Words, deeds even, the sublime human sum—  
insufficient. God turned His back  
The world went its way, marched away.

Then, something more. The more that is less  
No; least: a nothing Death.  
Into death they walked, those two.  
He with his cicatrice, his body a leison of lightning  
lit the way; she, begging bowl in hand.  
What then  
and how, they brought to pass, awaits our knowing.

But God's great gong we heard, sound panic  
at last, sound peace. And the gorgeous throat  
of the sleeping cock swelled, swelled to a rainbow  
And sixteen winds sped the word round the world's  
curvature, at last.

Too late, too late?

This is our history—  
God and we  
stood, long at impasse, back to back  
And the world went its way, marched away.

And then  
into death they walked, the woman and monk  
They are heard at last.

— Daniel Berrigan

# FROM LITTLE HOUSE



by Mary Ann McGivern, S.L.

My decades-long conversation with a hundred or so of those nearest and dearest to me about the essence of community came to temporary rest a few weeks ago with a comment from Virginia: for the early Christians, expression of the fact of their community seems to have been Eucharist. Perhaps, she suggested, rather than regular intense personal sharing or dedication to common work, regular common attendance at Mass is the core of our common life.

We've had weekly Mass at Karen House for almost eleven years now. Our first chapel was on the second floor, the room right across from the very large bedroom. By mid-October we'd moved it to the third floor to have space for more guests.

John Kavanaugh, Marty Manion, Bob Goettinger, Bob Gardella were the early celebrants. Ann and John and Kevin Burke and Jim Halliday provided music. I remember giving my first homily and what a grace it was. But most important in my recollections is the regularity of our prayer together. Tuesday nights we celebrated Mass at Karen House; Wednesday nights, after our community meetings, at the small Jesuit house on Evans; for about a year on Thursday nights also at Karen House. Phil Malone used to count the house for John and Dennis Kennedy, poking a little fun if the C.M. was a bigger draw than the S.J.

At Cass house every Wednesday Jim Krings and John Mueller came to cook dinner, do dishes, and clean up; then Jim would lead a celebration of the Eucharist. When Cass House closed two years ago, Jim

began coming here to share the liturgy every Friday afternoon.

Periodically we've tried to say the office or meditate together or design new patterns of prayer. Mary Dutcher has often been the one to invite us. But our schedules are varied and after a while the forms don't fit. The Eucharist doesn't always fit either, but we wrestle with the words and structure and style and we are changed.

One time, in the middle of a hard and enduring critique about dialogue homilies that meander, about whether the chapel was too crowded and the sense of community being lost, about music that doesn't fit the readings and about personal petitions that go on for ever, Tom Nelson brought a xylophone to Mass. He gave all the parts out ahead of time and after the readings -- a cry of anguish from Job and Zaccheus hiding in a tree -- he asked people to take out the brightly colored metal bars of different lengths and widths. They were pretty shapes and we admired them. Then Tom brought out the xylophone tray and asked someone to place their metal bar on it. It was a high note and he tapped it. Zaccheus, he asked? Tom has a marvelous capacity for waiting and slowly, almost reluctantly, members of our praying community, one by one, offered up their pieces of the whole. Tom played each note, played the notes he had together, and waited for the gift of another bar of music. Finally he played the entire scale and then he asked for our reflections.



Mary Ann McGivern's latest play, *SONGS IN THE NIGHT*, was recently given a staged reading at Forest Park Community College.

I thought we'd never stop talking! I found it so moving I can still remember what many people had to say. One of the high school students talked about her grandmother's death and one of the college students told her she was young and she'd learn better how to face suffering in a few years and I felt infinitely old. Jane Corbett spoke about the range of notes in our lives from Haiti to our presence together and I knew my own range to be infinitely narrow. Ellen asked if Job was a lucky man. Dave Schenk told how he felt to hear his note be part of the whole. We all spoke in our own voices and the whole was holy.

All our shared Eucharists haven't saved us from hard times together these past eleven years. Prayer is not a facile answer to the vicissitudes of life. But an essential part of who we are is a community that prays together. +



## From Karen House



by Katrina Campbell

The screeching of tires and a horrendous crash broke the unusual peacefulness of supper time. We all ran out doors, dreading what we might find. A car whose hood was strewn with bricks was limping down the road, leaving a six-foot hole in the wall. Someone had chosen to test the wall's strength with their Cadillac. The

car won against the tired wall.

While clearing away the rubble days later I recognized a value of this hole. Through the hole has come a stray pup, inquisitive children, men seeking labor, women seeking conversation. They came to help, to sit, to talk as we cleared the stone and dust. I saw families on afternoon walks; children playing in the grassy fields across the street; "little bear," the pup, bringing smiles and delight to Lee and guests. The wall with its hole struck me as a symbol of an opening to the broader community outside Karen House and myself.

The guests make such holes within my inner walls consistently. They startle me out of my own reality.

A moment after I confronted a guest about her ranting boisterous voice she stormed into the office pointing a sharp finger at me and ordered me to "Pray to God for understanding! God will help you to understand me!" Her words, though violent, rang with truth. Her forceful nature stirred a wall of anger within me

*Katrina Campbell, a member at Karen House, divides her time between nurturing youths at Edgewood Children's Center, nurturing the garden in our back yard, and nurturing her spiritual life.*

that God alone would help me to see through.

This spring I believe we were visited by an angel. We shook our heads at her odd behavior but some of us also saw beauty there. We guessed she had been abused because of her severe submissive and apologetic character. Her cowering meekness make me believe her to be slow, but she could play a mean card game and was quite perceptive. One evening while the two of us were painting homemade cards with watercolors she softly broke the silence and proclaimed she saw an inner struggle within me. I often build a wall around myself with the idea that I'm here for the guests. They startle me over and over with the message that they are there for me also.

Sometimes I build walls to protect myself from the pain and depression I see in the guests. A letter from Ann Manganaro spoke of similar pain when she described the people she has come to love in El Salvador. They have much faith and hope, she said, even in the loss of life, of health, of livelihood. Some meet their anxieties and fears with grace or some with great pain. I see similarities at Karen House, whose guests face a different war but similar pain. Christ calls us to lower our walls and embrace one another in healing compassion.

Please pray for our community this summer as we go through more transitions. Angie leaves in June. We will miss her gifts and her contagious laughter. Teka also leaves in June but will return in six months. We will miss her but are so glad she has chosen this needed time away.

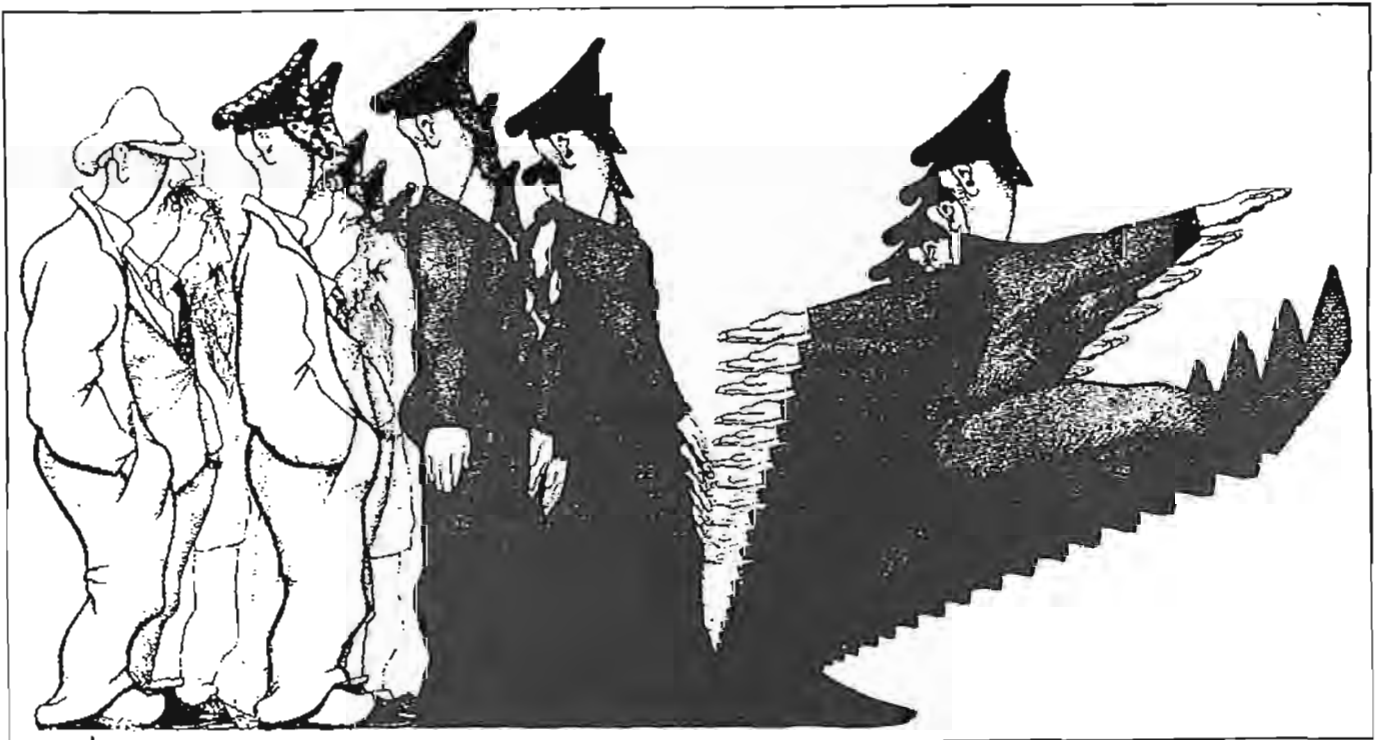
We already miss Jeff Finnegan, a Kenrick seminary intern who spent the spring with us. His ease and compassion with the guests that was such a natural part of him was a gift to all of us. The Church is gaining a wonderful servant of God.

It is good to visit brothers and sisters in other communities. Pat stayed a few days with the New York Worker in May. Jim and I spent Easter with the Bruderhof at Woodcrest and Pleasant View. Our discussions on issues of faith and obedience in Christ left a powerful impact on us. We thank them for their hospitality.

Thanks to all who helped fund our new roof. We were amazed with the immediate response. Thanks also to the many who have contributed work to our yard and house. Special thanks to the singles' group from Covenant Presbyterian who painted several rooms and brought us a wonderful meal. Thanks especially to Ron Sansone from St. Liborious who donated his talent in mending the hole in our wall. Walls also have moments of value!

The grace and peace of God be with you.

+



# FROM CENTRAL AMERICA

by  
Ann Manganaro, S.L.

After several months here in El Salvador, what have I learned thus far? And what, of all I've learned, should I try to write about, to share with you, dear readers and friends? Not only during Holy Week, but almost from the minute I arrived here, I've found myself pondering in amazement the experience of death that the Salvadoran people have known in the last ten years, and continue to know.

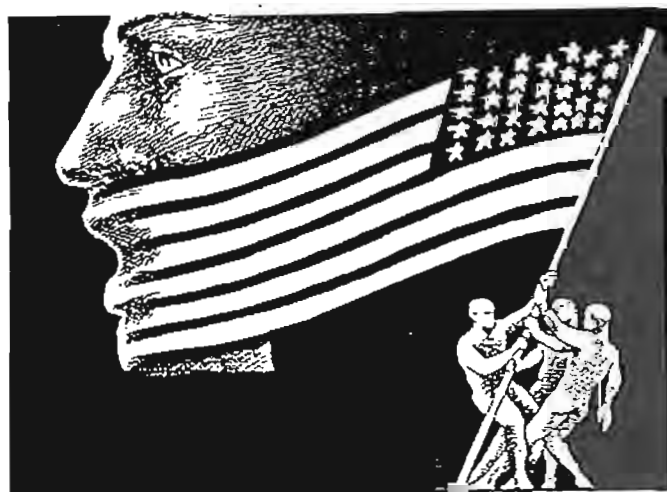
I had thought of myself as a person familiar with death, aware of how death is a part of life, willing to face death. I had seen my father die, and my grandmother, and several good friends. I had struggled to prevent the deaths of critically ill children in intensive care units or emergency rooms, and failed at times, and mourned that failure. I had waited with parents for the death of their children, when we knew that death was inevitable. I had seen hard and even horrible deaths. I had held dying children in my arms, watching their lives fade away. I had faced the possibility of my own death in a very vivid and immediate way when I learned that I had cancer.

Yet none of these experiences prepared me for the kind of death that is part of life in El Salvador. Not only the refugees at Calle Real, where I've been working since I arrived, but almost all the Salvadorans I have met thus far have experienced the murder of family and of friends. Not sporadic, violent murders such as happen all too frequently in the U.S. — but the cold, malevolent, systematic slaying of anyone who might threaten



Salvador's ruling class, however mildly and marginally. Murder on a massive scale. Death by terror, torment, torture. Death which touches everyone's life, and changes how one lives one's life.

A young man comes to borrow some colored pens from me, and when he returns he shows me a picture he has drawn of the place where his three brothers were murdered, in front of his parents, his mother wounded at the same time. He lets me read a poem he has written about them. It is the anniversary of their death, seven years ago, yet the moment is alive and vivid in his eyes, which shine with tears and love and loss.



That kind of encounter has been repeated over and over and over in my short time here. The stories spill out, suddenly, in the midst of our ordinary day's working and living: "all of my sisters," "my wife

*Ann Manganaro, S.L., is a founding member of the community who is now serving God by caring for the sick in the war-torn country of El Salvador. We miss her greatly and ask your prayers for her and for those she attends.*

and baby," "my lover," "my father." And I listen to the stories and fumble to say something, which is always inadequate to the reality of such overwhelming losses. And I ponder and pray for and watch in wonder these people who find the strength for life, for hope, for continued commitment even in the face of this kind of death.

There are, certainly, many who have been bent, and even broken by the stress of more than ten years of this terrible war. Even though the murders are not so widespread now as some years ago, they still occur. "Death Squad" slayings have happened since my arrival, and the possibility of a renewed, more virulent outbreak of killings hovers close to the surface of the imagination here.

It all makes for somber, sometimes

painful reflections. My heart aches with it, watching their faces, hearing their stories. Yet I'm not at all sad. I'm grateful to be here, learning from this Salvadoran people, from their experience of death but even more from their commitment to life. For this is a people very thoroughly and amazingly alive: mostly poor, simple but with a strong sense that they are struggling for justice and for dignity. It is a people with a wonderfully tenacious hope in life itself and in the God of life. I find myself learning from them what I always hoped to be true: that love is stronger than death.

So pray for them, please, and work for them if you can. Pray for me too, that I continue to learn and that I find ways to help and to heal.

+

## MEET THE ARTIST

Most of THE ROUND TABLE's covers over the past five years have been drawn by Larry Nolte. Larry is pictured below holding his son. In this issue, Larry's work graces the center spread. We are very thankful for his considerable artistic gifts and the generous way he has shared them with THE ROUND TABLE over the years.



CHILDREN'S ILLUSTRATION  
**LARRY NOLTE**  
 4021 NEBRASKA AVENUE  
 ST. LOUIS, MISSOURI 63118  
 (314) 481-6983



by Barb Prosser

Recently some family visits have caught me by surprise. Consider my last visit with my sister Maria.

I come from a close family and value my visits home to Minnesota. Likewise the family makes it a point to spend this time with me. On this visit, Maria was sharing the time with a friend who was on a few days leave from the Marine Corps. Mind you, my family is well aware of my feelings about the U.S. military's role abroad, especially in Central America. This particular weekend Minneapolis was the sight of a very dramatic response to what the Reagan administration had termed a Nicaraguan invasion of Honduras. A large crowd in Minneapolis reacted to the U.S. sending troops down by taking to the streets to show their disapproval.

When I woke up the second morning of my visit the newspaper showed how windows of the local military recruiting office had been broken during the demonstration. Greeting me over my morning coffee were Maria and Bob, her Marine friend. Our conversation was brief and bumpy.

Bob informed me that he had talked to his buddies at the recruiting office and he knew that this group of "dove freaks" had vandalized the office. I defended the "dove freaks," claiming the one or two persons responsible for the violence were not representative of the group. I had heard leaders of the group ask for a peaceful presence, so the dissenters who had broken the windows did not respect the group's wishes.

I finished my coffee in another room.

I was barely into my visit and I knew I had to re-evaluate how to deal with Bob. I needed to make a conscious effort to separate the person Bob might be from the Marine I saw.

I reminded myself that in this case he was acting in defense of his peers, peers that were only following their leaders — leaders they had put their trust in and

whom they believed were truthful. Bob had joined the Marines for personal growth through discipline and with the intent to do good for others. The reasons weren't so hard for me to understand. Indeed trusting in a leader and working with a sense of commitment to help others were motivations that I could easily share.

I struggled over how distressing it was (and is) that Bob's leaders had abused truths and misguided those who depended on them. I was not really angry at Bob for this as much as I was frustrated with Bob's inability to question the truthfulness of his leaders. I was reminded of the passive way so many choose to ignore the truth, especially concerning U.S. involvement in Central America. But of course I am also called to ask forgiveness for the times I have shown passivity in the face of disturbing truth.

Gandhi once said "the way of truth is the way of peace...So long as there is the slightest trace of violence in a person, they will fail to find the truth they are seeking."

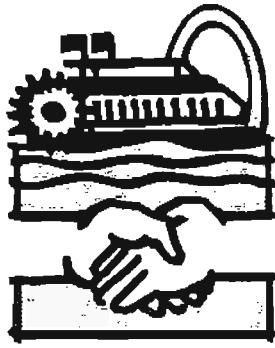
It is hard for me to imagine Bob, his peers or his leaders finding truth in the midst of such a violent system as the Marines. But the visit forced me to look at how I might best share these feelings with Bob and I was reminded of how resistant we all are to changes.

It was a good weekend for me, although I did not let it pass without expressing my views and asking questions. Nor did Bob remain quiet. But we did not attack each other, and I believe we probably heard each other once we lowered our defenses. Bob assures me this is not a career for him. Maria promised to look at taking the Marine bumper sticker off the car and to share THE ROUND TABLE issues with Bob.

I in turn have made a commitment to listen more carefully to the truths others hold and to probe more deeply those which I profess. In disallowing violence in the pursuit of truth, Gandhi was saying that truth must be found through love.

+

*Barb Prosser, after a brief rest from the nitty gritty of Catholic Worker life, is now volunteering as a house-taker at Karen House.*



## MISSISSIPPI PEACE CRUISE DEPARTURE CEREMONY FRIDAY, AUGUST 5 • 5-7 p.m.

Music begins at 5 p.m. – Ceremony at 5:30 p.m.

Luther Ely Smith Park, 4th & Market

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EXTEND YOUR HAND FOR PEACE

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Join us for the departure of the Mississippi Peace Cruise. Fifty Soviets and one hundred Americans push off from St. Louis on board the Delta Queen for a ten-day Peace Cruise to New Orleans. Black Gospel music by the North Area Choir, American folk music by Larry Long, Russian folk music by Soviet musicians, clown, giant puppets by River Faces Theatre, and Bill McLinn as "Mark Twain" as co-emcee will appear. Departure ceremony will also include observance of the anniversary of the atomic bombing of Hiroshima, and a procession led by River Faces Puppets through the Arch Grounds to the Delta Queen.

## PLEASE, COME COOK FOR OUR GUESTS

Our beloved and invaluable Lee Carter is leaving Karen House for her own place. So, beginning in early August, Karen House will be setting up a volunteer network to help us with our meal preparation and serving, and with processing food donations. Please consider cooking one meal a week or month, or volunteering in our food storage room a few hours per week. Call us @ 621-4052.



THE ROUND TABLE is the quarterly journal of Catholic Worker life and thought in St. Louis. Although subscriptions are free, donations are gladly accepted to help us in our work with the poor. Write to THE ROUND TABLE, 1840 Hogan, St. Louis, MO, 63106. People working on this issue include Margaret Boyer, June Brown, Katrina Campbell, Pat Coy, Virginia Druhe, Larry Nolte, Barb Prosser, Ellen Rehg, and Mark Scheu. Letters to the editors are encouraged!

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## THE ROUND TABLE

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