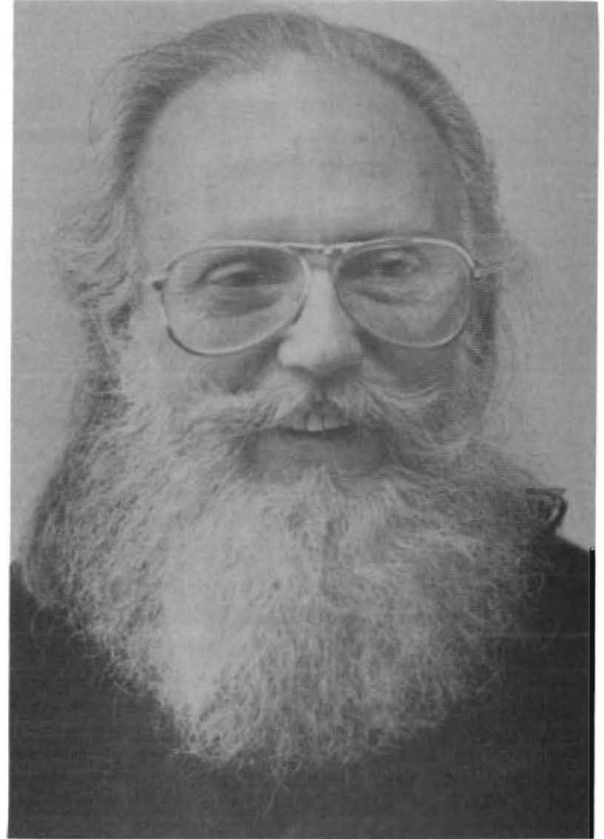


A LETTER OF THOMAS MERTON

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Editor's Note: James Edmund Magner, whose poem in honor of Thomas Merton appears in this issue, is Professor of English at John Carroll University in University Heights, Ohio. He has worked with underprivileged children and rehabilitating convicts, fought in Korea and spent five years in a Roman Catholic monastery. His volumes of verse include *Toiler of the Sea*, *Although There is the Night*, and *Rose of My Flowering Night*. He has received the Hart Crane Memorial Award from Kent State University, the Ohio Poet of the Year from the Ohio Verse Writers Guild, a special commendation from the Ohio House of Representatives and has twice received the George E. Grauel Memorial Fellowship from John Carroll University. His papers have been deposited at Ohio University Library.

In 1968, during a period of particular personal stress, he visited the Abbey of Gethsemani. He did not see Thomas Merton, but Merton wrote him a letter -- a letter which did not survive in the files of the Thomas Merton Studies Center. Professor Magner has kindly shared what he calls "My most treasured letter" with us and given his approval for it to appear here as "a gift to the readers of *The Merton Seasonal*."

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JAMES EDMUND MAGNER

jhs

July 1

Jim,

Found your note yesterday. I don't know how long it had been there or if you are still here. Sorry I can't see you, am swamped anyway and... It seems to me you are in a rather bad depression and what you need is not arguments but rest, change of outlook, whatever it is that will calm you down and restore perspective. How one finds such things out there I don't know. The poem is good but too souped up emotionally if you know what I mean. The only way people can handle that kind of thing is to keep some element of cool and tackle it objectively as if there were no values. In other words there is no point lamenting the utter loss of values everywhere. I should talk, I lament louder than anyone else.

Answer to your question: I was not aware that Christ had issued any strict dictates? The punishing Mama over in the Vatican has issued quite a few, but that is a different matter. What Christ said went beyond strict dictates: love without limit. Well, we have limits. That puts us in a bind right away. But love to the extent of our own limit. Forgetting our limit, not caring. Trust without limit, because God is the only one who cannot fail us. Everything and everyone else not only can but will, and we ourselves first of all.

That's strict if you like. But unlimited trust is the only sane root of all the rest of it. If one can't trust then it is mad to turn the other cheek... etc. And if one can't trust, one can only pray to be able to until eventually one becomes able.

Sorry, that's all I've got, but be at peace and God bless you.

TM.