

CATHOLIC WORKER

Vol. LXXXII, No. 1

January-February, 2015

Price 1¢

PROP Seeks Change in NYC

By BERNARD CONNAUGHTON

A couple of summers ago just before a meeting of the Police Reform Organizing Project (PROP) in Lower Manhattan, a teen-aged boy, an intern at the organization, arrived late to the meeting with this account: he was running to the subway and was stopped by the police who asked him why he was running and he said because it was raining. The police pushed him around, cuffed him and brought him to the precinct, kept him there a while, gave him a summons for disorderly conduct and released him. He arrived at the meeting shaken and told his story. The young man was black.

Heartbreaking as this story is, young black men being stopped by the New York Police Department is nothing new. In 2010 alone, well over 600,000 people were stopped, 87% of whom were people of color. Nearly nine out of ten of those stopped had been completely innocent. In the Bronx where I teach, one of my students told me he was stopped three times one day while driving with his small son. The issue became a major factor in the 2013 mayoral campaign and election of Bill DiBlasio who denounced the policies of former Police Commissioner Raymond Kelly and Mayor Michael Bloomberg. "Stop Stop and Frisk!" became a rallying cry.

The Police Reform Organizing Project was one of several grassroots community groups that formed to organize in response to the harsh policing tactics of the New York Police Department. In 2011 PROP initiated a petition campaign and has collected thousands of signatures calling for change from residents in Manhattan, Brooklyn, and The Bronx. Many who have signed the petition calling for reform have shared their own stories of interactions with the police. In The Bronx, the mother of a thirteen year-old boy told me her son had been arrested and brought to the precinct for sneaking on a school bus after school. A teacher from the Bronx reported that police were harassing students getting off school buses and actually arresting parents who stood by waiting for their children.

Last summer a group of PROP interns issued a report after spending several weeks observing and recording proceedings in the New York Criminal Court system. Those not familiar with criminal court in New York City might be surprised by this report which details the disproportionate number of defendants who are people of color. For example, on June 25, 2014, of the thirty-four cases seen in Manhattan Criminal Court Arraignment Part, thirty-three—or 97%—were cases involving people of color. Common charges included driving without a license, marijuana possession, aggressive begging, theft of services (legalese for jumping a turnstyle to enter the subway) and unlicensed general vending. On July 14, of the twenty-one cases seen in Manhattan Summons Part (defendants appear before the court because they have received a summons or a ticket) all of the defendants, 100%, were people of color. Common charges included: open alcohol container, public urination, failure to display a taxi or limousine license and loud exhaust.

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Robert Hodgell

On Holy Perseverance

By JIM FOREST

Though Dorothy Day and Thomas Merton never actually met, they exchanged many letters. The topics included peacemaking, observations about social change, problems in the Catholic Church, obedience and disobedience, the Cold War, community life, marriage, their hopes and frustrations, their current reading, the meaning of love, and more.

The oldest surviving letter in their exchange, dated December 26, 1956, is from Dorothy to Merton. He had written that he had offered Christmas Mass for her and the Catholic Worker. Dorothy wanted him to know that this "made me very happy indeed."

She goes on to say, "We have had a very beautiful Christmas here, and quite a sober and serious one too. There have been occasions in the past when the entire kitchen force got drunk, which made life complicated, but you must have been holding them up this year, and please continue to do so."

The next surviving letter is also from Dorothy. Dated the 4th of June 1959, it's a reply to a letter from Merton. In it she recalls

with gratitude the copies of **The Seven Storey Mountain** Merton had sent to her way back in 1948. She went on to ask Merton's prayers for a member of the Catholic Worker staff who was about to be sentenced for harboring a military deserter at the Catholic Worker and then aiding in the young man's escape. "We have done this before," Dorothy explained, "giving [deserters] the time to make up their own minds; one returned to the army and the other took his sentence." She mentioned to Merton another member of staff who she worried might be arrested for having torn up his draft registration card. In her letter Dorothy didn't offer a word of explanation or justification for such actions. Clearly, in Merton's case, she felt explanations weren't needed. In the same letter Dorothy thanked Merton for gifts he had sent to the Catholic Worker.

When I became part of the Catholic Worker staff in 1961 after being discharged from the military as a conscientious objector, gift boxes

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US Extends War In Afghanistan

By KATHY KELLY

News agencies reported in November that President Obama signed an order, kept secret until now, to authorize continuation of the Afghan war for at least another year. The order authorizes US airstrikes "to support Afghan military operations in the country" and US ground troops to continue normal operations, which is to say, to "occasionally accompany Afghan troops" on operations against the Taliban.

The administration, in its leak to the **New York Times**, affirmed that there had been "heated debate" between Pentagon advisers and others in Obama's cabinet chiefly concerned not to lose soldiers in combat. Oil strategy isn't mentioned as having been debated and neither is further encirclement of China, but the most notable absence in the reporting was any mention of cabinet members' concern for Afghan civilians affected by air strikes and ground troop operations, in a country already afflicted by nightmares of poverty and social breakdown.

Here are just three events, excerpted from an August 2014 Amnesty International report, which President Obama and his advisors should have considered (and allowed into a public debate) before once more expanding the US combat role in Afghanistan.

First, in September 2012, a group of women from an impoverished village in mountainous Laghman province was collecting firewood when a US plane dropped at least two bombs on them, killing seven and injuring seven others, four of them seriously. One villager, Mullah Bashir, told Amnesty, "...I started searching for my daughter. Finally I found her. Her face was covered with blood and her body was shattered."

Second, a US Special Operations Forces unit was responsible for extrajudicial killing, torture and enforced disappearances during the period of December 2012 to February 2013. Included among those tortured was fifty-one year-old Qandi Agha, "a petty employee of the Ministry of Culture," who described in detail the various torture techniques he suffered. He was told that he would be tortured using "fourteen different types of torture." These included beatings with cables, electric shock, prolonged, painful stress positions, repeated head-first dunking in a barrel of water, and burial in a hole full of cold water for entire nights. He said that both US Special Forces and Afghans participated in the torture and often smoked hashish while doing so.

Thirdly, on March 26, 2013 the village of Sajawand was attacked by joint Afghan-ISAF (International Special Assistance Forces) soldiers. Between twenty to thirty people were killed including children. After the attack, a cousin of one of the villagers visited the scene and stated, "The first thing I saw as I entered the compound was a little child maybe three years-old whose chest was torn apart; you could see inside her body. The house was turned into a pile of mud and poles and there was nothing left. When we were taking out the bodies we didn't see any Taliban among the dead, and we didn't know why they were hit or killed."

New York Times coverage of the leaked debate mentions Obama's promise, made earlier in 2014 and now broken, to withdraw

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On Holy Perseverance

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were not rare. The contents varied—sometimes cast-off clothing monks had worn before taking vows, often his most recent book, and also monk-made cheese and even a fruitcake flavored with Kentucky bourbon.

It's remarkable that, in his overfull life, Merton occasionally found the time to fill a box to be sent off to the Catholic Worker. He felt a deep sense of connection with what the Catholic Worker was doing—hospitality, the newspaper, protest.

His gifts communicated to all of us a deep sense of his solidarity. This sense of connection with houses of hospitality went back to Merton's days volunteering at Friendship House in Harlem, founded by a friend of Dorothy's, Catherine de Hueck Doherty, or "the Baroness" as she was often called due to her family's aristocratic Russian roots. Few choices Merton ever made were so difficult as deciding between a Catholic Worker-like vocation at Friendship House and becoming a monk at the Abbey of Gethsemani.

"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 [Jacques] Maritain.... [The] 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." (TM to DD, December 29, 1965)

In the first surviving letter from Merton to Dorothy, dated July 9, 1959, he starts out by letting her know that another gift box is on its way—some "sweet-smelling" toothpaste. He then goes on to tell her that he is "deeply touched" by her witness for peace, which had several times resulted in her arrest and imprisonment. He continues: "You are right going along the lines of *satyagraha* [Gandhi's term for nonviolent action]. I see no other way, though of course the angles of the problem are not all clear. I am certainly with you in taking some kind of stand and acting accordingly. Nowadays it is no longer a question of who is right but who is at least not criminal, if any of us can say that anymore."

In the same letter Merton confided to Dorothy his attraction to a vocation of greater solitude and deeper poverty. Deep questions about where, as a monk, he ought to be was not a topic that Merton touched on with many of his correspondents. It's clear that he saw in Dorothy someone capable of helping him discern God's will.

During their twelve years of correspondence, one of the recurring themes was perseverance. "My constant prayer," Dorothy confided to Merton just before Christmas in 1959, "is for final perseverance—to go on as I am trusting always the Lord Himself will take me by the hair of the head like Habakkuk and set me where he wants me."

In one letter to Merton, Dorothy speaks in detail about the bitterness animating some of the criticisms directed at her by co-workers. She senses the motivation of some of those who come to help at the Catholic Worker is less love than a "spirit of rebellion." (DD to TM, October 10, 1960) Many who knew her and were aware of the emotional and physical strains of Catholic Worker life were astonished that Dorothy persevered from the founding of the Catholic Worker in 1933 until her death in 1980—forty-seven years as part of a community of hospitality.

In his response, Merton noted that "more and more one sees that [perseverance] is the great thing," but he also points out that perseverance is much more than "hanging on to some course which we have set our minds to, and refusing to let go." It can sometimes mean "not hanging on but letting go. That of course is terrible. But as you say so rightly, it is a question of [God] hanging on to us, by the hair of the head, that is from on top and beyond, where we cannot see or reach."

This was a matter of acute importance to Merton personally, a monk who repeatedly was attracted to greener monastic pastures. Dorothy was all for Merton staying put. In a later letter, Dorothy remarks, "I have a few friends who are always worrying about your leaving the monastery but from the letters of yours that I read I am sure you will hold fast. I myself pray for final perseverance most fervently having seen one holy old priest suddenly elope with a parishioner. I feel that anything can happen to anybody at anytime." (DD to TM, March 17, 1963)

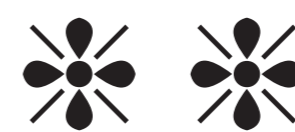
In one letter Merton reflects on the levels of poverty that he sees the Catholic Worker responding to. "O Dorothy," he writes, "I think of you, and the beat people, the ones with nothing, and the poor in virtue, the very poor, the ones no one can respect. I am not worthy to say I love all of you. Intercede for me, a stuffed shirt in a place of stuffed shirts..." (TM to DD, February 4, 1960)

Merton goes further with this topic in his next letter to Dorothy. "I was in Louisville at the Little Sisters of the Poor yesterday, and realized that it is in these beautiful, beat, wrecked, almost helpless old people that Christ lives and works most. And in the hurt people who are bitter and say they have lost their faith. We (society at large) have lost our sense of values and our vision. We despise everything

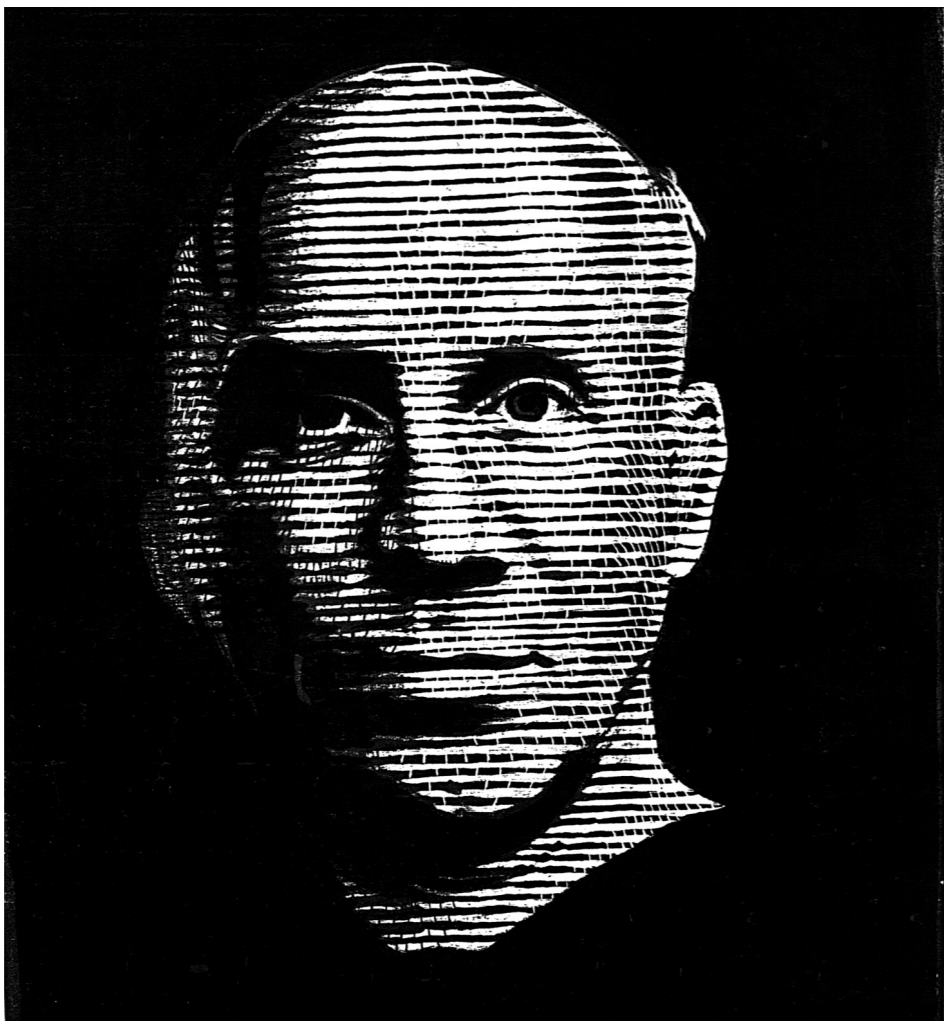
THOMAS MERTON



1915-1968



only two places in his vast body of writings where Merton refers to anarchism. (For Dorothy, anarchist meant someone like herself whose obedience was not to rulers but to Christ.) The other place is in an essay on the Desert Fathers, the fourth-century ascetics who created the monastic option, living quietly in places that people generally avoided. Here Merton sees the Desert Fathers as being "in a certain sense 'anarchists'.... They were men who did not believe in letting themselves be passively guided and ruled by a decadent state, and who believed that there was a way of getting along without slavish dependence on accepted, conventional values." (Introduction to *The Wisdom of the Desert*).



Kerry Dugan

grim topic—Christians crediting God with willing a storm of killing, Dorothy consoled Merton with the reminder that Dame Julian of Norwich, the medieval mystic, had written that "the worst has already happened and been repaired. Nothing worse can ever befall us." (DD to TM, August 15, 1961)

In the spring of 1962, Merton received an order from his Abbot General in Rome, Dom Gabriel Sortais, not to publish any more writings on war and peace. As a consequence, a book Merton had just finished writing, *Peace in the Post-Christian Era*, was published more than four decades after it was written. Merton found the gagging order not only outrageous but at odds with the prophetic dimension of the monastic vocation.

Merton obeyed but in fact wasn't quite silenced. He continued to write for *The Catholic Worker* but under such transparent pseudonyms as Benedict Monk. He remained a member of the advisory board of the Catholic Peace Fellowship, often giving its staff extremely helpful guidance. His abbot, Dom James Fox, decided that what the Abbot General had banned was publication of mass market editions of Merton's peace writings.

With his abbot's collaboration, Merton was able to bring out several mimeographed editions of *Peace in the Post-Christian Era* and another called *Cold War Letters* plus a succession of essays. Via the staff of the Catholic Peace Fellowship plus a number of other friends, these were widely distributed, including to bishops and theologians taking part in the Second Vatican Council.

For both Dorothy and Merton, the refusal to hate anyone was basic Christianity. It's not surprising to find one of Merton's finest meditations on enmity in one of his longer letters to Dorothy. Here is an extract:

"Persons are not known by intellect alone, not by principles alone, but only by love. It is when we love the other, the enemy, that we obtain from God the key to an understanding of who he is and who we are. It is only this realization that can open to us the real nature of our duty, and of right action. To shut out the person and to refuse to consider him as a person, as another self, we resort to the 'impersonal law' and to abstract 'nature.' That is to say we block off the reality of the other, we cut the intercommunication of our nature and his nature, and we consider only our own nature with its rights, its claims, its demands. And we justify the evil we do to our brother because he is no longer a brother, he is merely an adversary, an accused. To restore communication, to see our oneness of nature with him, and to respect his personal rights and his integrity, his worthiness of love, we have to see ourselves as similarly accused along with him...and needing, with him, the ineffable gift of grace and mercy to be saved. Then, instead of pushing him down, trying to climb out by using his head as a stepping-stone for ourselves, we help ourselves to rise by helping him to rise. For when we extend our hand to the enemy who is sinking in the abyss, God reaches out to both of us, for it is He first of all who extends our hand to the enemy. It is He who 'saves himself' in the enemy, who makes use of us to recover the lost great which is His image in our enemy." (TM to DD, December 20, 1961)

Here one sees in high relief what was at the root of Christian life for both Dorothy and Merton and that shaped their friendship. We know God and we know each other only by love. Without love, we become inhabitants of hell long before we die. With love, we already have a foretaste of heaven. ✚

Merton sometimes expressed to Dorothy his frustrations about his writing, wondering what good his words did, Dorothy offered deep gratitude for all that he published or privately circulated. In a 1965 letter to Merton, Dorothy wrote: "You will never know the people you have reached, the good you have done. You certainly have used the graces and the talents God has given you." (DD to TM, June 24, 1965)

The danger of nuclear war and the vast destruction of cities and life was a major concern for Merton as it was for Dorothy. Much of his writing on war and peace was published in *The Catholic Worker*, starting in October 1961 with his essay, "The Root of War is Fear," an expanded version of a chapter for *New Seeds of Contemplation*. A third world war fought with nuclear weapons seemed not just a possibility but a probability. Open-air nuclear weapon tests by the US and the Soviet Union were frequent.

For Merton was clear that Catholics would be no more hesitant than other Americans to play their part in initiating a nuclear war with the Soviet Union and would regard themselves as doing God's work. It was a

The Shelter Ethic

By THOMAS MERTON

[Excerpted from *CW* November, 1961—Eds. Note]

What precisely is the question? A great deal of discussion was aroused in October by an article of an associate editor of *America*, Fr. L. C. McHugh, S.J. Rather, to speak more accurately, a great deal of discussion was raised by the confusing and one-sided presentation of that article in the national press. The article itself is perfectly reasonable, and it contains nothing with which a professor of ethics would disagree. It states clearly that the natural law guarantees everyone a right to defend his life and the safety of his dependents, and that he may even defend his life with violence, risking the death of the unjust aggressor, if violence is clearly the last available recourse. It also makes quite clear that the violence may only be used at the actual moment of assault, and when the assault has been initiated with evident intent to kill. Lethal violence may never be used merely to forestall the possibility of assault. Finally, the violence must be limited to what is strictly necessary, and if possible the death of the unjust aggressor must be avoided.

These are purely and simply the principles laid down by Catholic moral philosophy, and it might be pertinent to observe, at this point, that they are definitely applicable in the case of what our missile people now refer to as "first strike" in nuclear war: by such principles as these, one wonders how the idea of a surprise attack on an enemy who is only feared as a potential aggressor could be accepted and blessed by any Christian moralist. Quite apart from the frightful injustice of the death and maiming of millions of innocent people, the mere fact of a surprise "first strike" on an all-out destructive scale, when no aggression has been initiated by the enemy, is clearly unjust and utterly unacceptable to a Christian moralist.

Most of the reports in the national press evidently failed to draw any attention to the most important paragraph in Father McHugh's article. I quote: "To say that one has a right to employ violence in defense of life is not to say that one has the duty to do so. Indeed, in the Christian view, there is a great merit in turning the other cheek and bearing evils patiently out of the love of God." Fr. McHugh hastens to add that this is "heroism" and a "dedication to a full Christian ethic that is far above what God requires under pain of eternal loss." He then points out that an "unattached individual" may well resign his place in the shelter in favor of someone else. This is excellent.

I have no intention whatever of criticizing Father McHugh, and I have absolutely no complaint about his principles. My intention is to speak about the whole situation that makes such discussion inevitable, and which dictated certain assumptions which to my mind completely falsify the Christian moral perspective in this problem. What is disturbing today is the widespread and unreserved acceptance of these assumptions.

What are they? First of all that a shallow backyard shelter itself makes any sense. That one can surely save his life by taking refuge in

one. That it is really worth the trouble having such a shelter, and that it is even so important to get into it that one can go to the lengths of killing another person in order to keep him out. This whole mentality is deeply disturbing. A fallout shelter might be of some value in Colombia or Peru—or perhaps in Australia. In the event of an all-out atomic attack on the US such a shelter recommends itself only to someone who wants to die in a small hole.

Secondly, a passive and uncritical acceptance of all the ambiguous political thought which is leading us step by step toward nuclear war. It implies a stoical resignation to the idea of such a war, and the conviction that nuclear war makes sense: that it may become "necessary" and even "Christian." Please do not misunderstand me: I am not trying to pin these opinions on the author of the article. I am just saying they are in the air that everybody breathes. They are disseminated like spiritual fallout by the irresponsible and immoral sensationalism of the mass-media.

Finally, in the moral thinking of many Catholics, there is a tacit assumption that the fulfillment of the minimal obligation and nothing more, is normal for a Christian! That anything beyond the very minimal becomes "heroic" and "cannot be demanded" of anyone. Perhaps we forget there are situations in which even the minimum demanded of a Christian can be heroic. It is certainly true that one might be obliged to leave the supposed safety of a shelter at the risk of one's life in order to minister to the grave spiritual needs of the neighbor we so readily consider as a possible target for our rifle!

It seems to me that at this time, above all, instead of wasting our time in problematological ways of saving our own skin, we ought to be seeking with all our strength to act as better Christians, as men of peace, dedicated wholeheartedly to the law of love which is the law of Christ.

This grave problem has to be seen in the light of very extraordinary circumstances. We are in the midst of what is perhaps the most crucial moral and spiritual crisis the human race has ever faced during its history. We are all deeply involved in this crisis, and consequently the way each individual faces the crisis has a definite bearing on the survival of the whole race. This does not mean that the way in which each individual protects his own rights is not a matter of great importance. Therefore, while each individual certainly retains the right to defend his life and protect his family, we run the risk of creating a very dangerous mentality and opening the way to moral chaos if we give the impression that from here on out it is just every man for himself, and the devil take the hindmost.

This is not only fundamentally unchristian, but it is immoral on the purely natural level and is finally disastrous even to the political interests of our children.

Fallout does not dispense me from the basic obligation to love my neighbor as myself and even in a case where it might be obligatory to restrain him from violence by force, I am only allowed to use this force with love for truth, for justice, and for my neighbor. I can never cease to value him or his life, and I should be willing to learn to accept injustice and violence, even death, for the sake of love and truth. To regard this as mere sentimentalism is to confess that one is blind to the real sense of Christian ethics.

Certainly a man owes protection to his family and dependents. No one questions that. Let it be quite clear that even nonviolent resistance not only recognizes but empha-

sizes this fundamental duty. There is no such thing as legitimate nonviolent passivity in this case. It is not ethically permissible for a man to stand by and let his helpless dependents be killed or overrun. Nonviolent resistance is active and positive. It takes very definite steps to protect rights, but these steps are nonviolent in the sense that self sacrifice for the sake of truth and rights takes precedence over everything else, and especially over the use of physical force against the aggressor. The nonviolent resister has the duty to lay down his life if necessary to protect the rights of his family. He is also ready to lay down his life in defense of the truth. The emphasis is on the readiness to sacrifice one's own life, not on the promptitude with which one will kill another to save himself.

Admit that the practical question of how to resist nonviolently in the case we are discussing (the fallout shelter) presents very serious difficulties. Such a case would require mastery of the supremely difficult and heroic technique of nonviolent resistance. In practice, where nonviolent resistance is impossible, then force may and should be used, rather than passive acquiescence. I must emphasize this point very strongly, because it is generally unknown or misunderstood. Merely pas-

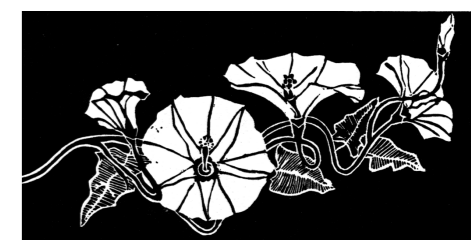
The Wild Places

By THOMAS MERTON

[Excerpted from *CW* June, 1968—Eds. Note]

sive acquiescence in evil is in no sense to be dignified by the name of nonviolence. It is a travesty of Christian meekness. It is purely and simply the sin of cowardice. Those who imagine that this kind of apathy is nonviolent resistance are doing a great disservice to the cause of truth and confusing heroism with degenerate and apathetic passivity. Hence even the proponent of nonviolence will allow that in practice a man might use force to protect the life and safety of his family in a fallout shelter, assuming that he was not able to solve the problem in a legitimately nonviolent manner.

Let us for the love of heaven wake up to the fact that our own minds are just as filled with dangerous power today as the nuclear bombs themselves. And let us be very careful how we unleash the pent-up forces in the minds of others. The hour is extremely grave. The guarded statements of moral theologians are a small matter compared to the constant deluge of irresponsible opinions, criminal half-truths and murderous images disseminated by the mass media. The struggle for survival, freedom and truth is going to be won or lost in our thoughts, in our spirit. It is because the minds of men have become what they have become that the world is poised on the brink of total disaster. ✚



June Hildebrand

completing the ruin of an area that is already a ghastly monument to callous human greed. Everyone will agree that "deforestation is bad" and when flash floods pull down the side of a mountain and drown a dozen wretched little towns in mud, everyone will agree that it's too bad the strip-miners peeled off the tops of the mountains with bulldozers. But when a choice has to be made, it is almost invariably made in the way that is good for a quick return on somebody's investment—and a permanent disaster for everybody else.

Aldo Leopold, a follower of John Muir and one of the great preservationists, understood that the erosion of American land was only part of a more drastic erosion of American freedom—of which it was a symptom. If "freedom" means purely and simply an uncontrolled power to make money in every possible way, regardless of consequences, then freedom becomes synonymous with ruthless, mindless and absolute exploitation. Such freedom is in fact nothing but the arbitrary tyranny of a wasteful and destructive process, glorified with big words that have lost their meaning. Aldo Leopold saw the connection, and expressed it in the quiet language of ecology.

"Is it not a bit beside the point to be so solicitous about preserving American institutions without giving so much as a thought to preserving the environment which produced them and which may now be one of the effective means of keeping them alive?"

Aldo Leopold brought into clear focus one of the most important moral discoveries of our time. This can be called the ecological conscience. The ecological conscience is centered in an awareness of man's true place as a dependent member of the biotic community. Man must become fully aware of his dependence on a balance which he is not only free to destroy but which he has already begun to destroy. He must recognize his obligations toward the other members of that vital community. And incidentally, since he tends to destroy nature in his frantic efforts to exterminate other members of his own species, it would not hurt if he had a little more respect for human life too. The respect for life, the affirmation of all life, is basic to the ecological conscience. In the words of Albert Schweitzer: "A man is ethical only when life as such is sacred to him, that of plants and animals as well as that of his fellow man." ✚

Much of the stupendous ecological damage that has been done in the last fifty years is completely irreversible. Industry and the military, especially in America, are firmly set on policies which make further damage inevitable. There are plenty of people who are aware of the need for "something to be done," but just consider the enormous struggle that has to be waged, for instance in eastern Kentucky, to keep mining interests from