

The Steere letters were written on Haverford College (Haverford, Pennsylvania) letterhead stationary unless otherwise indicated.

March 7, 1963

Rev. Thomas Merton
Gethsamane Abbey (Trappist)
Gethsamane, Kentucky

Dear Friend:

It was so kind of you to send me the copy of *The Thomas Merton Reader* through your publisher and I read it with great joy and appreciation. It is a fine collection of materials and I was especially glad to be able to read some of the things in there which were quite new to me.

When we saw you a year ago on the little visit we made down from Louisville, we had some talk about spiritual direction and I managed to buy your little book on that subject there at the book store in the Abbey. You also gave me an excellent mimeographed copy of your lectures on this subject and these have been especially helpful to me. I wrote a long introduction to a volume of the spiritual letters and counsels of Baron von Hügel, which will be out both in England and in this country in the autumn, and did it on spiritual direction, drawing the case study very especially from Von Hügel's handling of Evelyn Underhill. I am so glad to see you really making the proper distinction between spiritual direction and psychotherapy which has gotten very confused in our time and which needs to be most sharply marked out. I think this needs even further development than we have given it and I hope you will go further in future writings that you do on this subject on that very issue.

I have been so thankful for the things you have written on peace and it has greatly encouraged us all to see the witness that you have made. I shall be over in Holland this summer at the biennial Council Meeting of the IFOR. We will very especially remember your contribution there. Are there any special books that I could send you which you particularly want or need at this time? Please let me know if there are.

Dorothy Steere joins me in sending our warmest greetings to you. If we find any way to get to your part of the world again in June when we come up from North Carolina to Michigan, we will do our

best to let you know in advance and try to get to see you. With warmest personal greetings and with the deepest esteem.

Sincerely your friend,

Douglas V. Steere

We will represent Quakers at the Vatican Council in Rome in the autumn.

April 23, 1963

Thomas Merton
Abbey of Gethsamani
Trappist, Kentucky

Dear Friend:

Thank you so much for your wonderful letter of April 9th. I am looking forward so much to reading the things you have sent me which have come. It is fine that you are going to have this peace retreat soon and I see it as a wonderful thing for those who can come and be with you.

I have just been up to Harvard for this Roman Catholic-Protestant Colloquium and found a most generous temper there on both sides. I was hardly prepared for the rate at which this friendliness has come. Father Weigel in his banquet speech together with the president of Harvard University, said that things were coming in such a rate that he thought within a short time it might well be that the Jesuits might even join the Roman Catholic Church!

I am delighted that you are working on Fénelon. I just reviewed a French book on his relations with the Bible and in the course of it reread a somewhat superficial book, but one that brought back the life freshly to me by Catharine Little. It made me want to go back and read the letters and get closer to him again. People have very different tastes about him and some of the remarks of people like Evelyn Underhill have not been particularly complimentary. I have always found him a person of real insight and of a great deal of courage. When one thinks of the humiliations he must have suffered for his desire to do justice to what he had found in Madam[e] Guyon and of the vicious way in which he was treated by Bousset, and of the way in which the prince

that he had shaped for the kingship should die at the very point where Fenelon might have come into major influence—it shows what a wonderful character he was to have assimilated all of these terrible blows and yet to have gone on deepening in his faith. There can be little doubt that he remained an aristocrat and accepted the high station which he occupied almost as his due, but few have used it to better advantage and perhaps this is the test God will make of his life.

I will write you again after I have read these things and meanwhile, know how much we cherish your friendship.

Sincerely your friend,

Douglas V. Steere

June 13, 1963

Dr. [sic] Thomas Merton
Abbey of Gethsamani
Trappist, Kentucky

Dear Thomas Merton:

It was wonderful to hear from you on the 16th of May and to have your two papers on Fenelon. I read them with the greatest of interest and liked particularly your introduction to the letters which I trust will be published before too long. The fine way in which you showed how Fenelon was belittled and has been ever since by the French establishment is exactly right and I thought you put it extremely well. I sat down and read a little volume of Fenelon following on reading your fine introduction and felt again the profound spiritual wisdom of this great spirit. How seldom those in power even dare to acknowledge the authority of a spirit like this. I think you know something of what this experience is from the inside.

The Pope's passing is a great blow to us all and especially to those of us who were planning to be with him at the Vatican Council this autumn. Dorothy and I expect to be there, but now things may be drastically changed. It will be very interesting to have some forecast from you of what you think will take place although I expect all of us are simply looking into the darkness.

The kind of a question I wish you would write me about sometime if you ever feel free to do it, would be your own thoughts on what

kind of a state, or what proposals for a theory of the state, could a Christian revolutionary pacifist set down. I think this is the most rugged question for us to face and one which even Gandhi was unable to do more than to suggest decentralization and a level of life low enough so that it would not tempt your neighbor. Certainly there must be some discipline in order to supply the needed order for an established life in which families can grow up and work out their inner destinies. What could those who believe in a Christian way propose to supply this order both within local communities and in the larger units? A friend of mine named Mulford Sibley, who is going to be on the summer school faculty at Pendle Hill this summer, once wrote his Ph.D. thesis on this subject of the political theories of the pacifist and came up with a rather discouraging report. I really feel that this is the nub of the matter and that we must have something to say on this if we are going to be able to do more than be protesters. This of course goes very deep into the question of the applicability of the question of the Christian ethic generally, but I would be so interested in knowing how you would make this application.

Dorothy Steere and I remember so vividly the happy hours with you and hope that we can repeat them sometime soon. We both send you our warmest personal greetings.

Sincerely your friend,

Douglas V. Steere

Hotel Boston
Via Lombardia 47
Rome, Italy—Sept. 30, 1963

My dear Tom:

I am writing you from Rome where Dorothy and I are planted for the next period as Quaker Observer-Delegate at the Vatican Council. The opening yesterday was the greatest public spectacle that I have ever witnessed and for sheer magnificance could not be matched anywhere in the world. Even the five hours of sitting had its compensation in a way in being present on an occasion where Paul VI showed how deeply he affirmed the best line taken at the First Session of this

Second Council and how determined he was to implement it wherever he could. The new notes were a sharper articulation of his longing for a wider unity and his willingness for the first time almost in history to make a public acknowledgement of error and wrong on the part of the church in occasioning the separations and asking for as well as an offering of forgiveness. His words about the wide diversity and variety that would be acknowledged in the Christian community could an approach to each other be made was again a move beyond the "welcome home" suggestion which would imply that all of the yielding would be on one side. This note is not altogether absent even from this address but it is certainly far less to the fore than in most instances. It is fascinating to see the liberty of the Bishops as well as the Cardinals in pitching into those prepared schemata in the sessions of the Council itself and it helps the Observers to have validated their theoretical realization that there is anything but a monolithic picture behind the scenes. The move away from Council I in 1870 toward a fresh affirmation of the role of the bishops and of the collegium and of the pope and bishops in council together is one that if courageously pursued might make the Orthodox take a fresh look at the situation. The 1870 accent was such an exaggeration of papal authority that was then so largely usurped by the curia and worn by them, that nothing short of a major revolution could restore the situation to one that could even remotely attract the attention of the separated groups for all of their feeling of the sin of division with all of its disastrous consequences. It will be so interesting in the present schemata of the Ecclesia to see how this will be shaped. There are certainly present some powerful voices who feel with one of the Cardinals who alleged that it would take 40 years for the church to put back what John XXIII had undone.

I have just had a letter from Hugh Van Dusen saying that you very kindly agreed to read the Von Hügel *Spiritual Letters and Counsels* book and give them a comment which they might use in launching it. They stand to lose on such a book at best and need any backing that the friends of Von Hügel can give it if they think it is competently done. Hugh would be most grateful if you would write him directly at Harpers and Row 49 East 33rd St. New York 16, NY and let him have a brief comment as swiftly as you can manage it. I can well imagine what is before you on your desk and how far under the pile this may be but both of us would be deeply grateful if you could up-grade it a little.

If there is anything that I can do for you here at the Council, won't you let me know of it. If there is anyone here in Rome who seems to you to be one I should meet who is concerned especially for the life of prayer and spiritual direction, won't you let me know the name and how I may reach him. Dorothy joins me in sending you our warmest personal greetings.

Sincerely your friend,
Douglas V. Steere

Hotel Boston
Via Lombardia 47
Rome, Italy
26 • X • 63

Dear Tom:

Thank you for your good letter and for your great kindness in sending Harpers those helpful words about the Von Hügel book. It is so hard to get a book of this kind off the ground for FVH is not bedtime reading and the American public want something that is written to move and astonish.

I have met Häring and been greatly drawn to him. I saw him the next day after your letter at a magnificent Bach concert given the Council attenders with the Aachen choir and the Rome Opera orchestra and gave him your greetings. The splendour of the Papal establishment was never more regal than at such a concert with Paul VI on his throne and the cardinals in the orchestra seats and all of this ocean of purple everywhere. I do not quite know what this has to do with the Gallilean but it is Babylon at its absolute Sunday best. Häring is a man I want to see as much as I can of and I am delighted that he has some notions of returning to USA for some more lectures. This is the kind of man we so badly need. I am meeting one of your Kentucky men B. Ahearn [sic] at dinner Monday. He is a very lively Biblical scholar who takes an active part in the discussions which the Observers have each Tuesday with the Commission members of Christian Unity and is a friend of my dear friend Damasus Winzen whom he asked me to meet.

The other day I had a letter from John Coburn who is the Dean of the Episcopal Theological Seminary in Cambridge, Mass. and a writer and guide in Protestant circles on the life of prayer. He is trying to get a term off in order to go to England and see what the Anglican scholars have to give him on ascetic theology. I was talking about it in the Coffee bar at St. Peters and asking a Catholic scholar whether they had anything unique to give on this subject in USA apart from your books on the subject. He confessed to the sterility of such studies today as were in the schools. I saw Father Diekmann soon afterwards and mentioned to him the possibility of a little Ecumenical group of a dozen or so from Protestants and Catholics who might look over the field together mentioning the Carmelite Father MacNamara's efforts to spread this kind of thing on a more popular level. We both mentioned you and wondered if a little institution were set up at St. John's Collegeville, Minn. for a week or ten days in the summer of 1965 whether your monastery might be persuaded to release you to join us. He felt that he could set up such a group. I saw him yesterday and he said that the name of LeClerc [sic] had come to him since as another valuable member to have there if he was in USA that summer. I have since heard from John Coburn who would much like to be with us if he does not get this Guggenheim to permit him to study in Europe that summer. My suspicion from his outline is that Guggenheim will think twice before backing so specifically religious a venture but I may have too little faith. I suspect that Britain will have little to give him that he cannot get out of books by reading on this side. My feeling was that if we could look over the field and find what is really being done in the world and then block out some tasks for ourselves that this might be an ecumenical venture of the deepest significance of all.

I am interested that you have the proof of the Görres diaries. I read the Mss. for Harpers when it was being considered and suggested heavy cutting since she had put in so much that was only intelligible in the light of the German ecclesiastical situation although I like its frankness. I know her and have admired her boldness always. They replied to me that the British intermediary agreed with me in principle but dared not brave her wrath to begin to do the kind of cutting that I had advised. I shall be much interested to see how it really does appear. Stransky is also coming to dinner with us on Monday and I will greet him for you. I like him very much and he has been especially

helpful to all of us in the Observer group. The intellectual star of this crowd is young Gregory Baum from Toronto and he too has been very helpful to us all.

The Non-Christians Religions venture is apparently being considered by Cardinal Koenig from Vienna who has written a 3 Vol. work on the World Religions. The delicate problem involved is what to do with the Jews. The Sec. for X Unity think that it would be an insult to put them in with the other Non X Religions and intend to bring the Jews into their Commission. This however will almost certainly provoke the Orthodox Jews and rouse their suspicions so that it seems to me quite wrong in its strategy although admirable in its intention.

There is no definite word around about the time the Sec. will be set up but I suspect that there will be observers [sic] here at the next session of the council which may be in post Easter days or next autumn. No announcement has been made. I will let you know if I hear anything soon.

Any other suggestions you may have for me here that would help me explore Rome's hidden devotional resources will be most welcome, Tom. I am seeing that wonderful Benedictine Rector Augustine Mayer at S. Anselmo and am much drawn to him personally.

There is the perpetual power struggle on here and the Curia won a round this week when at a secret session of the 4 Moderators appointed by the Pope to expedite the business of the Council and the Cardinal Council and Presidents over who really had the power to move the meetings along and to frame issues to be discussed in order to get the real points in the schema out before the Fathers the vote was 11 to 9 against giving this authority to the Moderators—a power which they assumed came with their original Papal appointment. In ordinary society they might well resign and ask the Pope to clarify the issue or replace them but here they go on with reduced power and it will be up to Paul VI to decide whether he will intervene or not. The only way around now is for the Bishops who feel the laggard pace of the present arrangements to use delgated speakers after they have thrashed things out in their regional meetings and to see that more is done in Commissions and that they meet more often. Dear Pope John wanting not to offend made the almost irremediable mistake of appointing the Cardinal Presidents of the different Congregations as Chairmen of these Commissions and while he repeatedly distinguished between Council and Congregations, he had already delivered over

the keys to these insiders who have little interest in speeding up the Commission work and are sure that if the Council recesses and gets out of Rome they can have things much more their own way. But God has his ways and the educative process of this mingling here of these bishops from all over the world is enormous whether anything else is done or not.

Dorothy joins in sending you our best.

Douglas [Steere]

Rome, Italy
19 • IV • 64

Dear Thomas Merton:

We have stopped by at Rome on our way up from Africa and before we leave in the morning, I just wanted to write to you and to tell you first of all how deeply thankful I was to you for that fine statement I discovered on the Harper and Row edition of the *Spiritual Counsel* and *Letters of Baron Friedrich von Hügel* which appears this week in USA and to tell you that in talking with Father Häring, this wonderful Redemptorist who had been helping so enormously in the Council, at lunch today, when I told them that Father Diekmann of Colleveville was hoping very much to get you to come to a spiritual institute that they are setting up at Colleveville in 1965 for ten or a dozen each of Catholic and Protestant scholars of Spiritual Theology, how overjoyed he was to hear it. He has promised me that he would try to arrange to come over for something else and to be there with us. Father Diekmann and I both felt the want of solid work in this area except for such a very few people like yourself and the need for some fresh approaches to it and felt that this might be an ecumenical undertaking that would implement the talk about the bridges that has been going on here. Our hope would be that this could take place at the end of the summer perhaps at the very end of August 1965 for about ten days and that from the Catholic side you and perhaps Barnabas Ahern and Father Häring and Father Diekmann and a Carmelite father who has organized a Carmelite spiritual institute and a French authority on pre-medieval spirituality together with four or five others and from the non Catholic side it has been left up to two or three of us to coopt

some seven or eight others. I would be grateful to know candidates in either rank that you would think should surely be there and these can be considered. Father Diekmann felt that with such an Institute in prospect there might be an arrangement made to make it possible for you to come if you would favor us with this piece of your time. I think that it could result in a new impetus to this side of the life of religion in our time and through it we might block out certain pieces of work that different members would agree to undertake. For me personally it would be an unbelievable experience to have such a block of days with you.

I hope that you got a full set of my Letters from Rome. There were five in all. I expect at the next session to get here for the last four weeks at least and perhaps for the whole of the fourth and final (?) one.

I have been seeing some of the people in the Council on this short visit and find that the Commissions have all been most active in the last four months and that most of the schemas have been completely redrafted. Those that have not come up yet were ordered to compress their content into propositions and then have a longer relatio telling what went on to produce these. The schema on the church, ecumenism, lay apostolate have been redrafted and the one on ecumenism has had its fifth chapter completely recast and I am told strengthened. It is the final chapter—the Jews being treated in an appendix. This treatise on Religious Liberty is I am told attached in such a way that it can be detached and separately promulgated if this is the Pope's wish and many feel this would be the best disposition of it. I am assured that the appendix is not a way out for the Jewish document which is almost unchanged except for omitting the reference to the other world-religions in the preface [sic] story statement where they should have been left unmentioned or else a great deal more should have been said about them. The first alternative was taken.

The Pope's speech to the Italian bishops last week made it almost certain that there would be no further pressing for concluding the council with this session as had been implied in early speeches so that now they expect to have a calendar and allot time to the different items and urge councils of bishops from regions to thresh out the substance of their criticisms in regional sessions and then appoint one of their number to speak for both majority and minority opinion in the group. They hope to finish the one on the Church, on Ecumenism, on Lay Apostolate and to air the controversial Commission 17 schema

which is apparently quite stout in its present revised form. From the discussion on this, they will revise again for the fourth session so there is no thought of finishing this at the third session. You will be overjoyed, as I am, that Father Häring has been made secretary of this Commission 17 where the issue of peace and war comes up and where there is a chance to get some sentence in that will peg unmistakably that the CO position is an evangelical alternative that a Catholic may take with the blessing of the church or at least without its harsh disapproval as in the case of this priest who received six months in prison and an equal thump from the Holy Office for testifying in a Catholic CO layman's defence that the church did have scripture for such a position and acknowledged it. As far as I know, Häring is as near to being a revolutionary Christian pacifist and as I have ever found in the Roman Catholic Church and in his new post is determined to keep the issue of peace and war before the Commission. This I write to you in confidence and only to let you know that from within the church there is real hope on the things we hold precious. Karl Rahner is also willing to see that the CO has a recognized position in the church although he does not share Father Häring's views.

I am going up to England after a brief visit to Munich and will work away there on a little book on this Rhodesian poet-saint that Dorothy and I have dug out material on in Southern Rhodesia in the past months. She joins me in sending you our affectionate greetings.

Your friend,

Douglas Steere

[P.S.] The Council president MARELLA and secretary HUMBERTCLAUDE have been chosen for a secretariat for the Non-Christian religions.

April 26, 1964

Dear Douglas:

It was very good to get your latest from Rome and to hear the news of your trip to Africa, and especially of meeting Fr. Häring. Yes, he is a marvelous person and I suspect he must have had a hand in *Pacem in Terris*. A brief talk I had with him here was very rewarding. I must write to him and send him a couple of the latest things that

have been mimeographed here. I will put them in an envelope for you too.

It is true that Godfrey Dieckmann [sic] wrote and asked me about my coming to Collegeville, and I forget what I answered. It cannot have been very definite because I have not yet taken the bull by the horns and asked permission. I am rather certain that the permission will be refused, and I am not complaining of this really. Thinking the matter over soberly, I believe that it is rather important that I don't get involved in travelling around because if I do the last vestiges of a monastic life will just go out the window. It would be a great joy for me to get out and see places and find out what is going on and especially to meet people and discuss important things. And yet too I think it may be of very great importance for me just to sit still here, and stay in the woods, and try to be quiet [sic] still, and even eventually write less. This has some of the sound of a fond hope, I know, but really I think that the matter of travel and going out for conferences etc represents a sort of Rubicon that ought not to be crossed, unless it were question of going somewhere more remote and more quiet to be more out of sight and take a plunge into at least temporary total solitude. I don't expect you to agree fully, but in any event I think that the Superiors will still look at it somewhat in this light, though in the Order as a whole there is a tendency to fling wide the doors and get more active. I wonder if this really makes sense, though. And I wonder if those who are doing it really have motives they understand, or are just impelled to do it and think their impulsion is a charism?

I know Fr. William [McNamara] OCD. He stopped by here briefly, and his place in the desert is certainly fascinating. If it were a question of going somewhere like that. . . . Well, I won't speculate.

If in the Council we can at least get clearly admitted the right of the Catholic to be a conscientious objector, something will have been gained. And I also hope that in schema 17 there will be something quite definite again about the total irrationality of war as a means of settling international disputes today, a principle which, if once admitted, ought to show the verbalizing about "just war" to be as trivial and as nugatory as it really is. As to the business about the Jews, whatever may be the rights and wrongs of Hochhuth's "Deputy" (I have read it but not seen it, or rather I read enough of it to get the point, and gave up in sheer boredom) this ends up by being exactly the same issue. Failure to come out for the Jews because of political implications and

difficulties. The other question: what would have been the real meaning and effect of Pius XII protesting? And the real meaning and effect of this statement? As to the non-Christian religions, I think that is an important venture indeed, though I don't foresee it getting far as yet. For my own part I have been appointed to do surveys of publication in the field of Oriental mysticism etc for the magazine of our Order. That is a start, and I expect it to be interesting.

Tell me more about your Rhodesian poet-saint. I think you mentioned the subject a long time ago but it is no longer clear in my mind. As to Von Hügel, I am glad the Letters are out and hope Harpers won't forget to send me a copy. They probably have and it has been delayed.

Best wishes to both you and Dorothy
Most cordially always in Christ,

[Thomas Merton]

Feb. 20, 1965

Dear Douglas:

I am very glad to hear from you and to receive the booklet on Africa which I will read with much interest, particularly since I have not been able to get much information about South Africa. Many thanks.

Some time ago I had the melancholy experience of having to write Fr Godfrey Diekmann and say I would be unable to come to Collegeville. This decision was not mine, it was made for me without appeal by my Abbot. If the matter had been entirely up to me, there would have been no question of my coming. I know that such an exceptional opportunity would have been a great grace for me, and I would have participated in the meeting with much interest and, I am sure, great benefit. I still regret that I will not be able to come, and if I thought there were some way of getting there I would make the attempt. But I really do not see any way of changing my Abbot's decision, which is final. On the other hand, if he did change his mind there would be no obstacle. The matter is entirely up to him. As I told Fr Godfrey, if he or you want to write to Father Abbot, by all means do so, but I don't think it will do much good. Perhaps Fr Barnabas Ahearn [sic] might be able to suggest to him reasons why it would be important

for me to be there. But as for my own efforts, they have no further chance of success, and I think he really does not want me to go at all for any reason. The reason why I mentioned Fr Barnabas is that Fr Abbot knows him well and has great respect for his opinion. But even he would not manage, I think, to change his mind.

I will write later about the Council. Did you meet my friend Sister Luke there, the woman observer from America? She is a very remarkable person and I think you would like her. She is from a convent a few miles from here.

My very best wishes to both you and Dorothy. When will we see you again down this way? You are always welcome.

Cordially yours in Christ,

[Thomas Merton]

Sept. 14, 1965

Dear Douglas:

It was very good of you to send me the resume of the discussions at Collegetown. I will go through them with interest and will hope to read the talks themselves in Worship. I want to make clear how much I regret that I was not able to be present. That was not my choice, I assure you. I felt bound to do what I could to attend, because I felt that it would be of great benefit to me and to my community in the first place. Also I must say that I firmly disagree with the theology behind the decision that kept me here. This negative and short sighted view of the monastic life actually ends up by stifling the Spirit, I believe. Of course it is quite true that there is some very real danger of activism in the contemplative life, and one must guard against it, but the inability to make any exception whatever seems to me dangerous and in the long run fatal for the contemplative life itself. But there is no possible way of discussing this with the ones concerned. The lines of communication are simply closed.

On the other hand, if you see Fr Häring in Rome, you might seriously ask him this question: while the monastic Orders should naturally maintain their principle of separation from the world and even from active parish work, is it not a real misunderstanding of the present day theology of the Church to forbid monastic priests who are quali-

fied and willing, to undertake any form of apostolic work, even as a temporary exception, and even when they are urgently requested to do so by bishops for instance in Latin America. In other words is it really the spirit of the Church to prevent at all costs a priest, a member of a contemplative Order, from volunteering for example to do some temporary apostolic work outside his monastery in Latin America? I know that the principle would perhaps lay itself open to some abuse, but it seems to me that simply stifling all initiative in this direction is going to harm the monastic life. But I do admit that the Superiors have a real problem of keeping the contemplative life contemplative. I just do not think that a narrow and negative view is going to get the results they envisage. It has not done so in the past, it is not doing so in the present. And we are losing good vocations because they see that in the monastery the life tends to be to some extent sterile and inert, and any attempt at seeking creative solutions is suppressed before it can even be thought out and discussed thoroughly.

I would have been very happy to have a group of you down here to discuss these and other things. But again, it is a question of the local policy. It is true I have obtained permission to be a hermit and have entered into the new life which, I admit, suits me very well. I am not anxious to get into a lot of activity which would spoil this. But at the same time I do not consider that a rigid, negative, restrictive and suppressive view of the solitary life is the answer. I am afraid that the chief reason why my Superiors have given me this chance is that it enables them to say "Now it is obvious that you cannot have any contacts with the outside and that you must lead a purely contemplative life." If those are the terms, I accept them, but once again I think that the negative and limited view behind them is unacceptable and out of accord with the theology of the Church. In a word, to say that there must be a class of people, even priests, who must be prevented from exercising an apostolate even temporarily, and even when there seems to be a very good reason for it, seems to me to be quite contrary to Christianity, especially today. However, God has His own ways of getting things done. Naturally I will be thinking of you at the Council, and will be keeping this momentous session in my prayers—especially Schema 13. I hope to send you a copy of an open letter I wrote to the US Bishops, when it is printed. It is on Peace.

Thanks again for all your kindness. Do believe that I remain deeply united to you and to all my friends in Christ. The frustrations

of the situation here will not hurt me. They are annoying because they are so blame *wrong*, but apart from that I know that there is good in it all for me, and I know the power and value of the Cross—at least I hope I do, somewhat. Certainly the solitary life is very fine. It seems to me that only here in the hermitage have I come to the real fulfilment of my monastic vocation. I also find that a great deal that passes for Gospel truth about the hermit life is simply false: most of the objections have been framed by people who have no conception of what the life is all about.

Again, best regards and blessings to you and Dorothy and to any friends of mine you may encounter in Rome.

With cordial good wishes in Christ,

[Thomas Merton]

Foyer Unitas
30 via S.M. dell' Anima
Rome, Italy
20 • X • 65

Dear Friend:

I so much appreciated your good letter and we have often thought of you in your solitary retirement. I am sure that you will make of it a time of blessing both for yourself and for us all with God's good help. He is always there and always more than willing. But how seldom we let him in. One of the fine things about our time at Collegette, was Jean LeClercq [sic] on devotional reading. He brought us into the tradition of the ancient Fathers of reading slowly and with another mind and mood from the usual one, with a great openness and suggested that for steady use, this was a kind of prayer that was very acceptable to God. I had run across this kind of reading in the desert where the Coptic fathers in their solitary caves and huts out from places like Wadi Natroun in Egypt read the Fathers that way and make it their daily occupation. I wonder how you are spending your time and whether this has any place in your day. I would be very interested to know what you make of it. For most moderns it would take a course in remedial reading in reverse, for today they teach people to race and scan instead of to pause and savour and receive the blessing which each word may conceal. I ran into a story once of an old rabbi who

decided to read a collection of Jewish wisdom and at the end of the first day was still on the first page, and the first week and even the first month ended with his getting no further. His disciples reproached him for his slowness and his only reply was to ask them why he should go on when he found this page so immeasurably comforting.

I picked up a book "The Thundering Abbot" by Bremond on your founder DeRancé when I was threading my way past the book barrows on my return from taking Dorothy to a retreat over near the Palazzo Colonna yesterday and have read a good piece of it. I wonder what you think of it. It is written with Bremond's inimitable grace and charm but in many ways it is a devastating book. Biography is a fine art but what a dangerous one, for how difficult it is to know oneself and one's motives let alone to know another's through the veil of centuries. I suppose that the Trappist order has its roots more deeply in St. Bernard than in this fierce reformer who lanced it into being. How do they look on DeRancé today?

The Council is in recess this week so we are a little freer than we have been for a long time. The Commissions are working late and early to get the tidying up that is required completed for the sessions next week. I will find out what they are doing on Peace and War at lunch today when Bernard Häring is coming to us. I fear that this Chapter V will not be improved by the work on it yet the speaking of men like Alfrink and Abbot Butler was said to be very fine. I was in England at just the time they made their interventions but I had worked to get them to speak out on the C.O. issue and hoped that Butler would tackle the disastrous sentence in the Schema on regarding the holding nuclear weapons in the present situation as "not illegitimate" and he did not disappoint us. Your fine letter to the American Bishops was most helpful. We do not have many alas in the American camp who are of much use. After long wavering I was told that Cardinal Ritter did not give his intervention which was against the nuclear threat in the aula but chose just to turn it in. It was better than not to have done it at all—but showed his unwillingness to stand up as the foremost American liberal Cardinal and be counted on this issue. Some said he did not want to unleash Hannan again but his word carries far more weight in the Council than Hannan's ever would. In spite of the tameness of the final Chapter V a good deal of education on the issue of peace is going on and this may have its effect in the long pull. The Pope was fine at most points at the UN but as always he took back

with the left hand what he gave with the right in this statement about the defensive weapons which must be retained as long as we have the sinful nature of man—this is all the great powers now need to ease their consciences and know that the Church will support them when the showdown comes. This was the same tip-off which this disastrous sentence in the schema made to the great powers.

I have been asked to write a paper on Mysticism and its philosophical implications for a small but rather select symposium that some Foundation is setting up next year. What have you come across that would have bearing on this issue that would be helpful to look at? I have some ideas of my own but would like to see something to try them on. Old E.I. Watkins has always seemed to me to give the best Catholic formulation of the problem in modern times but I probably know your literature too little to know the best place to turn.

You will be glad to hear that Father Godfrey Diekmann is back at the Council and in good health again thanks to a long rest they ordered him to take before letting him come over here. John C. Murray has been in the hospital with a collapsed lung and has only the last days felt he was making any progress. He is frail and has had a huge load on him in these weeks.

Dorothy joins me in sending you our warmest greetings. We see your old friend Sister Mary Luke often. I spoke to Cardinal Suenens the other day and asked him whether it would not be a wonderful thing to have one of the women auditors address the Council before it closed and incidentally mentioned Sister Mary Luke as a good one to do it. He brightened up and said he was seeing the Holy Father next week and would ask him. Nothing may come of it but it would be a fine thing if it happened.

Yours

Douglas [Steere]

Jan. 17, 1966

Dear Douglas:

Thank you very much for the charming piece on Bethlehem. I really enjoy it. What with Angelus Silesius, Pascal, Zoroaster, and the Spirit in all of it. Thanks.

I have owed you two letters for a long time, since the time of the Council. And Collegetown, I believe. I heard more of that from Dom Leclercq who was here in October.

As to the Council, I have had to write a somewhat hasty commentary on the Constitution on the Church and the World, and it is not satisfactory at all. But when I have a copy I will send it along. It is for quick publication (alas) in England, but perhaps when I have had some time to think and amend it may be worth doing more carefully here. Hence I would appreciate comments, if you get time.

As to this little piece which I enclose, I wrote it at the request of Hildegard Goss Mayr for their magazine in Vienna. I have not made any decision about publication in English. I was wondering if Pendle Hill would be interested? It would have to be a pamphlet or a magazine article (or perhaps part of a collection of essays by others). At any rate you can say what you think about that, if you get a moment. I would be glad to hear from you anyway, just to know how you and Dorothy are doing.

The hermit life has been working out very well, in its own way. For one thing I have no longer any question whether it is the thing for me. It is. It seems to me to be the only kind of life in which in a twenty four hour day one can begin to have time to get down to the real business of life. And even here there are other things to be done besides living. But I think that the apparent conflict is by now my fault and not that of just everybody. However things do seem to be pulling together into a real simple unity, meditation, psalms, reading, study, wood chopping, one meal at the monastery, writing and so on. The days are not long enough. Did I ever send you a copy of the translation of an early Carthusian letter on the solitary vocation? Tell me if I did not, and I will.

I understand that things are a little more hopeful about Viet Nam. I certainly do hope there will be some reasonable kind of solution soon.

My very best wishes and regards to you and Dorothy, and all blessings.

Cordially in Christ,

Tom Merton

March 25, 1968

The Reverend Thomas Merton
Gethsamane Abbey
Trappist, Kentucky

Dear Friend:

I have long wanted to write you to share with you a number of things and to make a proposal about a meeting of our little Institute for Contemporary Spirituality that goes on in a very creative way. I think you know that from the very beginning we had so hoped to have you with us and to have you as an integral part of this undertaking of the sharing of the spiritual traditions of the Catholic and non-Catholic groups. That was not possible because you felt unable to leave the monastery in 1965 in the situation where the Abbot was opposed to it. We have not given up the hope that we might have you with us one year. I wonder if, at this long distance ahead, I could ask you frankly whether, if the little group of some twenty-two or -three persons who usually gather the week that begins with Labor Day were to express a wish to come to Gethsemane for their session in 1969, you felt you could come out of your seclusion and be with us, and whether the Abbey would welcome offering this hospitality to this group.* I do not yet know the topic for 1969, but suspect it may be in the field of ecumenical retreats which is coming up before us in a challenging way at this meeting, and probably will deserve a session soon, at least. We have had magnificent people in the group and the spirit of the exchanges has been beyond their best hopes. If you could write me soon and give me some clue to your feeling about this matter, I would be very thankful.

I have read your little book on Zen and greatly appreciated it. I wonder whether you got my letters written during our journey last year—especially the fifth one, which told about the colloquia we had both in Japan and India. This may indicate to you how much concerned I am in this area.

I have just stopped in Arizona on my way back from the West Coast and been up at Sedona, where Father William McNamara has been trying to share the Carmelite tradition with people who are not within the monastic walls. I know how much you would be concerned with what he is trying to do. I shall see him in Connecticut today and

carry on some further talks. He is up there with Otis Maxfield, who is much concerned for the contribution of depth psychology to the inward life. There is so much that is creative going on in this area of our concern today.

I have accepted an invitation to give some lectures in Louisville at the beginning of March in 1969 and, if you could receive us, Dorothy and I thought we might drive down from there to pay you a little visit. Perhaps you do not find visits helpful and I will quite understand this. She joins me in sending you our warmest greetings.

Sincerely, your friend,

Douglas V. Steere

* This would of course be financed by us through a gift to the monastery to cover the costs. It would include 2 or 3 women and last 4-5 days.

March 29, 1968

Dear Douglas:

You mention sending five letters last year and not getting a reply. I remember getting two and I think I replied to both or at least to one: but evidently this correspondence was being intercepted. Perhaps because the Abbot was afraid of my getting more of those invitations which, for some reason, he objected to so strongly. However that Abbot has now retired, though this does not mean that I have freedom of movement—but still I have a bit more. To what extent I may be able to attend groups and conferences I don't know, and actually I see I will have to be slow to do so and maintain some pretty strict limits.

As to holding a meeting at Gethsemani, that is certainly possible in principle, but at the time you suggest the diocesan priests are here on retreat and require all the facilities to themselves. This year at another time would not be so good as I have several such meetings (nuns) going and have about filled up the quota of demands I can make on the retreat facilities. But there will always remain a possibility for this sort of thing. Or I might possibly be able to attend one of your meetings elsewhere.

But this year I think we must still consider it impossible for me. I am sorry.

On the other hand, I shall look forward to seeing you and Dorothy when you are in Louisville in March 1969. Do please remind me when the time comes round and I will see that you have reservations if you wish to stay overnight. There is a separate Ladies' Guest house.

Do let's keep in mind for some future year the possibility of a meeting here.

With my very best wishes always, and cordial regards to you both,

Your friend in Christ,

[Thomas Merton]

April 22, 1968

The Reverend Thomas Merton
Trappist Monastery of Gethsamani
Trappist, Kentucky

Dear Friend:

Thank you for your good letter. It raises one or two problems that I want to be absolutely sure about before passing this word on to Robert Lechner. Do I understand that there might be a good chance of the Monastery welcoming a visit by our group in 1969, but that you will have to wait until the new Abbot is installed before being able to raise the question? Do you think that it is more likely that we could be able to persuade you to come to us at some other Catholic center in that Labor Day week of 1969 than to try to have this meeting at Gethsemane? I think that you see that we are very eager to have you with us in that year and that we would do anything we could to make this possible. There are many places that we can go to on both the Catholic and Protestant side, so that we are not at all pressed for location, but had thought of coming down to Gethsemane in order to be sure to have a session where you could be present. If you could answer these questions for me within the next week or two, I would be very thankful for we must begin to make our plans soon and I did want this matter to be cleared up.

I am mailing you a copy of the 5th letter of these ones that were sent out last year and I think you may find these colloquia interesting to you. The privilege of coming close to these wonderful people was

not a small one and I hope that some of this kind of thing may go on beyond this initial attempt. Having the colloquia ecumenical in character made all the difference in the way in which we seem to be able to move with each other.

What a period we are in with Martin Luther King's assassination and the Johnson regime seeming to do everything possible to hinder taking up the wonderful initiative that was proposed to us a fortnight ago. How can we talk about peace in one breath and call up another 25,000 reserves with the other? No one can trust our sincerity any longer after exhibitions of this kind. We must be born from within again and this will certainly be an agonizing struggle. I am not at all sure that your prayers each day may not be nearer to the heart of beginning this renewal than anything that is being done. How can we interpret the power of intercessory prayer in any better way than to practice it with burning intensity? Is not that the place where we must begin?

We shall look forward to seeing you in March, 1969, but let us keep in close touch in the months between. With deep affection,

Sincerely, your friend,

Douglas V. Steere

April 25, 1968

Dear Douglas:

This is an immediate reply, in order to clear up any confusions about possibilities for the Meeting. The chief problem is the *date*. The early part of September is the time reserved for the local diocesan clergy and there is no room for anyone else in the Guest House.

The second slight problem is that though the new Abbot would permit such a meeting, he is trying to cut down on Guest House activities and might conceivably be more favorable toward my simply going somewhere else. But it would be a matter of giving him time, and this year is too soon to bring it up. Also I am not sure of being free this September.

Hence, there may be some hope for the future, but nothing is quite certain yet. In any case I do look forward tentatively to March 1969.

Really the times are exceptionally grave. One feels that there is a sickness in the air which one cannot quite apprehend because it is both too vast and too new: and one still does not "feel" deeply struck and grasped by it. The Plague is very real. And a long struggle will be necessary. I doubt if any of us will see the real issue of it, unless it issues in complete apocalypse.

On top of the general tragedy, I have a small personal one. A dear old aunt of mine, a most sweet gentle person, was lost in a tragic shipwreck in New Zealand with many other people. It was a great shock.

Thanks for your mimeographed letter which I have not yet read. But now I have it, and hope to report on it later.

My very best to you and Dorothy,
in Peace,

[Thomas Merton]

[Undated]

Dear Friend:

This is just a swift note to send with this copy of Edgar Brookes pamphlet that is just off the press. I am leaving for Tennessee in a few minutes but wanted you to have this for it is to me the best statement I know of the way through on South Africa by an old Christian veteran of the most wonderful spirit.

You are still the one whom I so deeply hope will be drawn to join us August 31-Sept. 7 at Collegeville, Minnesota for this gathering on the spiritual life. The Non-catholics met at Pendle Hill a fortnight ago to prepare for this gathering and they were very keen and feeling that perhaps this occasion was one where we should in a very special way see God's purpose for the specific guidance of the spiritual life with which the Christian religion is charged. I know that you will be open for coming if it seems right for you to do so.

Dorothy and I are returning to Rome next autumn for what I suppose will be the closing session and any commissions that you have to lay on us we shall try to carry out. I have been in close touch with Bernard Haring about the CO statement getting in the text and about

not letting the forces prevail who would weaken the statement on Nuclear war which the present version contains.

With warmest wishes.

Yours faithfully,

Douglas V. Steere