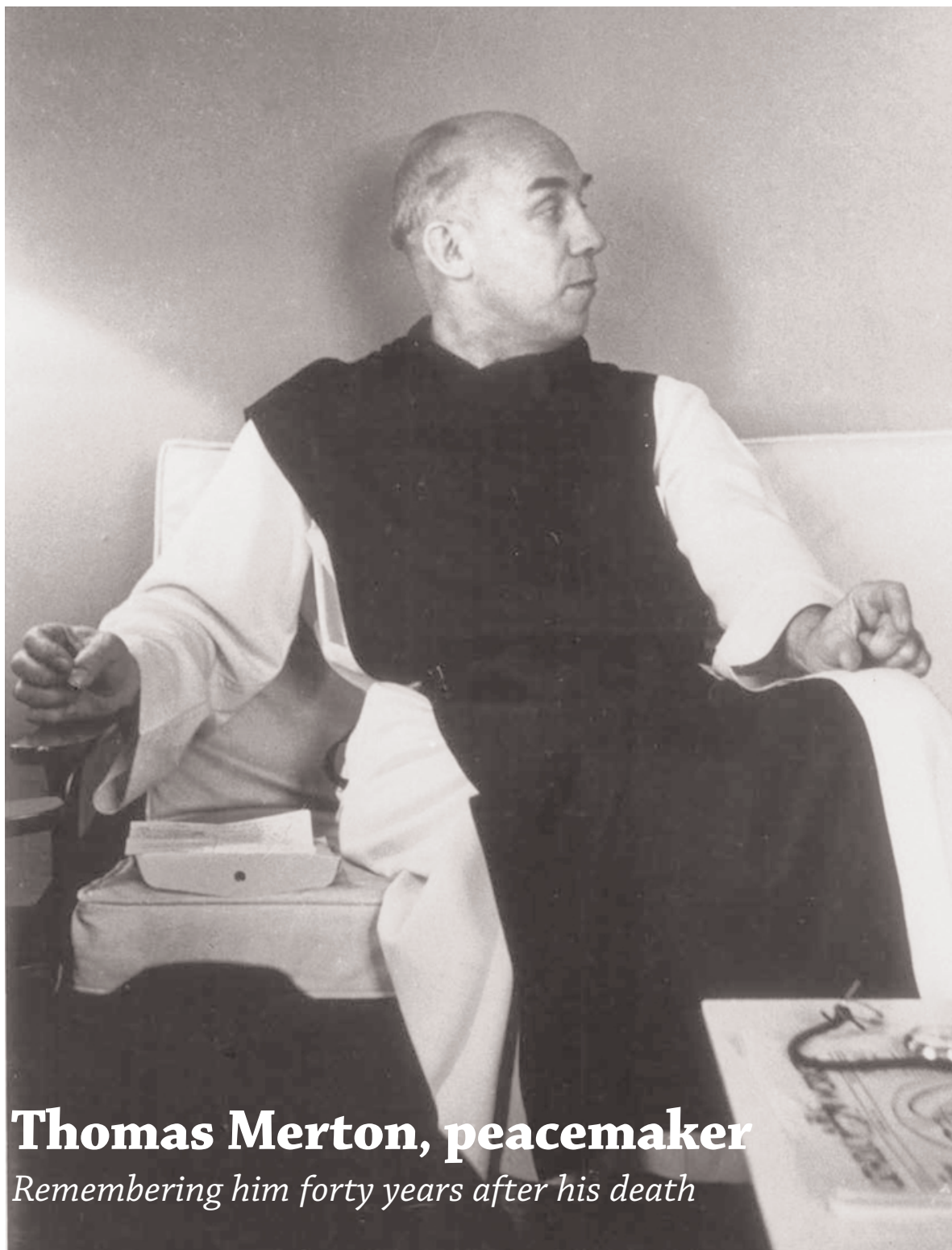


the
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Journal of the Catholic Peace Fellowship

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Thomas Merton, peacemaker

Remembering him forty years after his death

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COVER:

The photograph was taken by Jim Forest (Burns Library, Boston College Archives) at "The Spiritual Roots of Protest" Retreat.

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about this issue

It has been forty years since Thomas Merton's body was flown back from Asia in an US Air Force plane also carrying the bodies of soldiers who died in Vietnam. This issue of *The Sign of Peace* offers an introduction to the life and thought of this good and holy monk and priest who supported CPF in our early years and remains a tremendous influence upon us today.

In preparing for this issue we received a gracious letter from Merton's former secretary and gifted author in his own right, Br. Patrick Hart, OCSO.

He wrote: "I do want to congratulate you all on this fine journal which is so needed today more than ever, and I will presume to assure you that Thomas Merton would encourage you to keep up your essential work as peace-makers[...]be assured of a continued remembrance in prayer before the Lord of peace."

The CPF staff wishes to thank Br. Hart for his prayers and kind words of support and for all of Merton's friends who contributed to this issue.—THE EDITORS



Cross by Merton's Hermitage (Photo by Jim Forest/Burns Library, Boston College)

Corrections

In our last issue we mistakenly reported that the number of suicide attempts in the US Army in 2007 was 3000. While, tragically, the number of Army suicide attempts has quadrupled since 2002, the number of attempts in 2007 numbered just more than 2000.

Also, we misspelled the name of the author of "*The Challenge of Peace & Evangelium Vitae*." It was written by Gerard V. Bradley, Professor of Law at the University of Notre Dame.



ROTC, the Ivies and Catholics

On September 11, 2008 at Columbia University, then-presidential candidate Barack Obama was asked about the disconnect between Columbia and the Reserve Officer Training Corps Program (ROTC). In the Vietnam War era, Columbia (along with four other Ivy League schools) disinvented ROTC from their campuses while other Ivies drastically limited their relationship with ROTC because of the moral outrage caused by the war.

For many at the school today, the main complaint against ROTC has shifted from anti-war sentiment to concern over the military's policy regarding homosexuals. Still, other concerns also remain, like the US Department of Defense (DoD) having full control over the curriculum and direction of the program.

Barack Obama challenged Columbia, his alma mater, to re-instate ROTC: "I recognize that there are students here who have differences in terms of military policy, but the notion that young people here at Columbia or anywhere, in any university, aren't offered the choice, the option of participating in military service, I think is a mistake."

It turns out they *are* offered the choice, and this fact reveals an interesting link between the Ivies and Catholic colleges. When schools such as Columbia refuse to host ROTC, where can their students turn for an institution not laden with such moral objections?

To their Catholic neighbors. That's right, St. John's University in Queens, a Vincentian school, and the Jesuit-founded Fordham University in the Bronx both host ROTC and gladly allow students from Columbia or surrounding schools to participate in their program.

We took interest in this story because the Catholic Peace Fellowship has long been critical of Catholic colleges accepting lucrative contracts with the DoD and hosting ROTC programs with a curriculum determined solely by the DoD—so tightly controlled that the Catholic colleges cannot even mandate a course on Catholic just war theory in the ROTC curriculum. It is ironic that Catholic colleges often fear hierarchical control and seek to avoid bishops' interference at all costs, yet so many are willing to hand over the reigns to the government.

Across the country Catholic colleges and universities have eagerly sought to become more elite, more "prestigious," more like, well, the Ivies. The goal is to be mentioned in the same breath as the Ivies, those oldest exemplars and paragons of quintessentially American higher education.

How ironic, then, that the one instance when the Ivies can look to us Catholics for help is to inscribe their students more fully into US military culture.

This issue of *The Sign of Peace* will not focus on Columbia University nor on its newest alumnus-turned-president. Rather we will take a good look at another Columbia graduate, Thomas Merton. We hope that Merton, forty years after his death, can help lead us to reflect deeply on our mission and identity as the Church. This mission goes beyond questions about ROTC and DoD contracts (but it certainly includes them). This identity is rooted not in our current political debates but in our pilgrimage through history as the followers of Jesus.

As His people, we have now passed from one liturgical year into another. That transition included the celebration of Christmas, when we celebrate the birth of Christ—Emmanuel, the Prince of Peace. The Byzantine Rite liturgy for the season tells us something of the nature of our Messiah: "When the Lord Jesus was born of the Virgin, the whole creation lit up. Behold: shepherds keep watch, the Magi adore, angels sing hymns of praise, and Herod trembles, for the Savior of our souls has appeared in the flesh!"

Can we even imagine our present-day Herods trembling, even a bit, at the prospect of a united, nonviolent Body of Christ?

While we are not suggesting that the one purpose of the Church is confrontation with heads of state, we are saying, as we say so frequently, that the Incarnation and the Redemption should have real effects in every part of public and private life. The Word becomes flesh: what part of human life should not be transformed? Christ suffers the agony of the garden: whose heart should not tremble? God reconciles all things: can anyone be excused from the hard work of forgiveness? As we approach the season of Lent let us ask ourselves: In what ways do we—as persons and as a Church—hesitate to follow Jesus Christ in the long, long Way of the Cross?

—THE EDITORS

Peace Briefs

News Compiled by the CPF Staff

Judge Orders Army to Discharge Christian CO

This past fall US District Judge John Sedwick ordered the US Army to grant conscientious objector status and an honorable discharge to Private First Class Michael Barnes, a Fort Richardson-based paratrooper who underwent a crystalization of conscience in Iraq two years ago that left him opposed to war in any form.

While training in Anchorage and listening to the stories of soldiers returning from tours in Afghanistan and Iraq, Barnes said he first began to question his place as a Christian in the army. Barnes said he began to ask himself "whether or not I was living my life to serve the Lord."

Barnes applied for CO status in December 2006 and had his claim denied in 2007. Judge Sedwick's decision supersedes the Army's denial of Barnes' claim.

Barnes stated, "I can no longer justify spending my short time in this world participating in or supporting war[...]I must try to save souls, not help take them. I fear not for my life, but for my soul."

New Book by Joshua Casteel

Friend of the CPF, Joshua Casteel has a new book out. *Letters from Abu Ghraib*, (Essay Press) is a collection of email messages sent by Casteel to his friends and family during his time as a US Army interrogator and Arabic linguist in the 202nd Military Intelligence Battalion. It is the raw and intimate record of a soldier in moral conflict with his duties. Once a cadet at the US Military Academy at West Point and raised in an Evangelical Christian home, Casteel found himself stationed at Abu Ghraib prison in the wake of the prisoner abuse scandal. He was troubled by what he was asked to do there, although it was, as he writes, "miles within the bounds of what CNN and the BBC care about." Forced to confront the nature of fundamentalism, both religious and political, Casteel had to ask himself a fundamental question: "How should I then live?"



Update on War Resister Ehren Watada

Citing the constitutional protections against being tried twice for the same crime, federal Judge Benjamin Settle ruled in October that US Army First Lieutenant Ehren Watada cannot be court-martialed a second time on three of five counts. The military has been barred from retrying Watada on charges of missing his redeployment to Iraq, taking part in a news conference and

participating in a Veterans for Peace national convention.

The Army could still retry Watada on two counts of conduct unbecoming an officer because of some of his statements in media interviews. As Watada awaits word on this possibility he will remain at a desk job at Fort Lewis, CO, an assignment he has had since his highly publicized refusal to deploy to Iraq with his combat brigade in 2006.

BC Students Challenge Military Contractors

A group of about twenty Boston College students protested the presence of weapons manufacturers at the college's annual fall semester career fair. Some student protestors wore shirts that read, "Who Would Jesus Bomb?" while kneeling silently in front of the recruitment tables of military contractors BAE Systems and Raytheon. Others dramatically posed as recruiters from a fictitious arms manufacturing company to challenge those attending the fair to think about what working for a weapons manufacturer entails and asks of a person.

The demonstrators brandished a banner that read "DO JESUITS SUPPORT CLUSTER BOMBS? KICK RAYTHEON AND ALL WAR OFF CAMPUS!" and issued a statement to the university community that, in part, stated, "we believe we have an obligation to peacefully demonstrate the presence of weapons manufacturers on our campus" and asked if by hosting such contractors BC supports those who are "helping to build the Kingdom of God," or those that "create the deadly bombs to destroy it."

This is the fifth consecutive year such a protest has taken place at the BC career fair.

GI Rights Update

The hotline usually picks up this time of year as more soldiers go home on leave and decide not to return. Many of these people find that they miss their families too much and simply cannot go back to their units. Others realize they have become conscientious objectors in the time of clarity they experience while separated from military life. Instead of returning to deal with the lengthy process of applying for conscientious objector status, many simply opt for going AWOL.

It is not uncommon for soldiers and their family



members to hold outlandish ideas of what is in store for them upon being reported AWOL. This misunderstanding is often due to false rumors and angry sergeants who call parents, threatening everything from the impossibility of future employment to the death penalty. There is little doubt some mothers who call us worry more for their children when they are avoiding or expecting military punishment, than when they are deployed overseas. To add to the confusion, the actual degree of punishment can vary greatly from life-altering punitive discharges with jail time to relatively painless separation, depending on where the soldier stands within a matrix of intersecting variables (such as rank, branch, time spent AWOL, location of unit, reason for leaving, etc.). To combat misunderstanding, we have been working to compile letters from returnees who have recently gone AWOL, to provide along with our own knowledge, to troubled soldiers and their families. While we do not counsel soldiers to break the law, we do believe they should have accurate information on which to base their decisions.

The Holy See and the “Battle for Peace”

Recently, the Holy See has increasingly called for disarmament in the international community in what it is calling a “battle for peace”.

At a signing of a treaty ratified by nearly 100 countries that aims at putting an end to the use, manufacture and stockpiling of cluster bombs, Archbishop Dominique Mamberti, Vatican Secretary for Relations with States, commented that even in the midst of the present economic and financial crisis the “military budgets and spending are unfortunately growing at an alarming pace.”

Record Numbers Celebrate St. Marcellus Day

The celebration of St. Marcellus Day in Northern Indiana continues to grow. Last winter we reported on this annual event that remembers the witness of the third-century centurion who renounced his soldier’s belt and sword and refused to worship Caesar. This Christian martyr’s relics now reside in the altar at the Basilica of the Sacred Heart, Notre Dame, Indiana. Years ago, the late Mennonite scholar and Notre Dame Theology professor John Howard Yoder drew attention to the presence of these relics that were obtained by the University’s founder Fr. Edward Sorin, CSC. In the mid-1990s, peace-minded students began to mark the memorial of St. Marcellus, October 30th with prayer. For the last five years, the Center for Peace and Nonviolence of Saint Joseph County, an ecumenical coalition of churches, has made the observance regional. Hundreds of people, some from out of state, attended this year’s activities which included a luncheon with Professor Alan Krieder of Associated Mennonite Biblical Seminary on “The Practices of the Early Church that Nurtured a Bold Peace Witness”, a three-mile pilgrimage, a dramatic re-enactment of the story of St. Marcellus, and testimonies of contemporary conscientious objectors. The events culminated with a prayer service at the Basilica of the Sacred Heart, which featured music by the Manchester College Choir, a retelling of the story of St. Marcellus by Nelson Kraybill of Associated Mennonite Biblical School, and an explanation of the veneration of relics by the rector of the basilica, Fr. Peter Rocca, CSC. The evening’s program ended with a talk entitled “A New Consciousness for Peacemaking,” given by Fr. Richard Rohr, OFM.

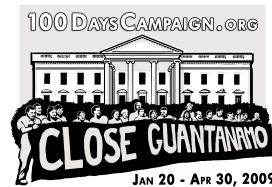


Altar where St. Marcellus’
relics rest
(Photo by Jim Forest)

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The 100 Days to Close Guantánamo Campaign

The CPF is a proud sponsor of the 100 Days to Close Guantánamo Campaign which began on January 20, 2009. Although President Obama has announced the closure of the US prison at Guantánamo Bay, the shutting down of CIA “black sites,” an end to the Military Commissions, and a ban on the use of torture by federal personnel, there is still much more work to be done. To find out more about the campaign visit the website: www.100dayscampaign.org.



The CPF is Going to New Mexico!

Members of the Catholic Peace Fellowship will be traveling to Albuquerque, New Mexico from March 20-22, 2009 for the upcoming Center for Action and Contemplation’s conference on “The Emerging Church: Conversations, Convergence and Action.” The CPF will have a table at this gathering which aims to draw together Christians interested in “a fresh, broad and ecumenical understanding of Jesus; spirituality that links contemplation and action; social justice and holistic mission; and authentic community.”

More information on the conference can be obtained at the center’s website: www.caradicalgrace.org or by calling 505.242.9588. ☩

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A Holy Man of Contradictions

BY JAMES MARTIN, SJ

On January 31, 1915, in a small town in the French Pyrenees called Prades, Thomas Merton was born. His father, Owen, a New Zealander, was a painter of some renown. “My father painted like Cézanne,” wrote Merton with evident pride, “and understood the southern French landscape the way Cézanne did.” Ruth, Merton’s American-born mother, was also something of an artist: his parents met while studying at a studio in Paris.

Merton enjoyed a lifelong appreciation of French art, language, and culture. He wrote feelingly about France in the early pages of *The Seven Storey Mountain* as “a setting for the best of the cathedrals, the most interesting towns, ... and the greatest universities.”

In many ways, France would always represent home for the rootless young Merton. Years after he left the country he returned in a roundabout way: by joining the Trappists, the Order of Cistercians of the Strict Observance, a religious order founded in Cîteaux, France. (The word *Cistercian* is a version of the town’s original Latin name, *Cistercium*.) His background had practical applications, too: as a young monk at Gethsemani, Merton was asked to translate numerous documents from the order’s headquarters in France.

But for most of his early life Thomas Merton found himself without a real home: his childhood was, by almost all accounts, sad. Tom’s mother died when he was six. Thereafter his father moved the family from place to place, town to town, and country to country while he pursued his artistic career. For a time the family (which included Tom’s younger brother, John Paul) lived with Ruth’s family in Douglaston, New York and then for a while, in Bermuda. During their stay in Bermuda, Owen, hoping to sell some of his paintings in New York, left Tom in the care of a woman author he had just met. (His father’s casual passing off of his child to a recent acquaintance still seems shocking to me.) Later, Tom, Owen, and John Paul returned to France, taking up residence in a town called Saint-Antonin, where Merton enrolled in a nearby secondary school.

One summer, with his father traveling once again, Merton boarded with the Privats, a Catholic family in Murat. This proved a “great grace” for the boy. Tom Merton was moved by the affection shown him by this

elderly couple and their young nephew, who became his friend. The passages in his autobiography describing his stay with the Privats are among the tenderest he ever set down on paper. “I owe many graces to their prayers,” he writes, “and perhaps ultimately the grace of my conversion and even my religious vocation. Who shall say? But one day I shall know, and it is good to be able to be confident that I will see them again and be able to thank them.”

In 1929, Merton was sent off to a boarding school called Oakham, in Rutland, England. He hated it. (The chapter relating his experiences at this time is entitled “The Harrowing of Hell.”) Around this time, his father fell ill, suffering from the effects of a brain tumor. Visiting Owen during a summer holiday, Tom was startled to find his father’s London hospital bed covered with drawings “unlike anything he had ever done before—pictures of little, irate Byzantine-looking saints with beards and great halos.” In 1931, a few days before Tom’s sixteenth birthday, his father died.

A bright and articulate young man, Merton won a scholarship to Clare College, at Cambridge, and began his university studies. But it was an even less congenial place for Merton than Oakham had been; he referred in his autobiography to the university’s “dark, sinister atmosphere.” Tom spent much of his day carousing with, as he described them, “a pack of hearties who wore multicolored scarves around their necks and who would have barked all night long ... if they had not been forced to go home to bed at a certain time.”

While in England, according to some later biographers, a dissolute Tom fathered a child. Many years later, when Merton was about to enter the Trappists, his guardian undertook an unsuccessful search for the woman and her child. The mother and child, it seems, were killed in the Blitz during the Second World War. Some sources contend that the Trappist censors who were responsible for vetting Merton’s manuscripts removed this episode from *The Seven Storey Mountain* so as not to offend the presumably delicate sensibilities of the time. As I read Merton’s biography, unaware of this part of his life, I was puzzled by his frequent expressions of self-disgust and his oft-stated fear that his past would be an impediment to his entrance into religious life. Later biographers would provide a fuller account of this difficult chapter in Merton’s life.

The childhood and adolescence described in *The Seven Storey Mountain* were lonely and aimless, as Tom failed to make close friends. He suffered separation from his only brother, missed his parents deeply, and

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behaved in ways that disgusted him—drinking, smoking, partying, and always showing off. Tom seemed forever to be searching for something, while remaining unaware of what he was searching for. One thinks of both St. Augustine’s rambunctious youth as described in his *Confessions* and Dorothy Day’s description many centuries later of her “long loneliness.”

After considering Tom’s experiences in England, Tom’s guardian suggested that he return to the States to continue his education. Merton accepted this advice with alacrity: “It did not take me five minutes to come around to agreeing with him.”

Columbia University and New York City proved more agreeable for Merton. He met many companionable young men (though it would be some time before he established healthy relationships with women) who remained his friends for life. He found his studies enjoyable. Tom also came under the influence of the popular English professor Mark Van Doren, whom Merton admired for his sense of “vocation,” and his “profoundly scholastic” mind, which helped prepare Merton to receive “the good seed of scholastic philosophy.” With characteristic self-absorption Merton concluded, “I can see that Providence was using him as an instrument more directly than he realized.” Of course this was true, but as described it sounds as if the sole reason that Professor Van Doren was placed on earth was to help Thomas Merton understand Thomas Aquinas.

One passage in the autobiography about Merton’s college years stopped me cold. Almost as an aside, Merton notes that he became a cartoonist and, later, art editor of the university’s humor magazine, the *Jester*. I had to read this twice to make sure I hadn’t misunderstood. As it happened, my only extracurricular activity during college (other than smoking pot and drinking beer) was being a cartoonist and, later, art editor of the university’s humor magazine, the *Punch Bowl*. This was a small coincidence, but how many art editors of Ivy League humor magazines are there? Reading that passage cemented for me my connection to Tom Merton: for the rest of his story, I was with him, on his side.

His autobiography made it clear that Merton cut a wide figure at Columbia. Just a few years ago I was given a confirmation of this. I was running a book club at a Jesuit parish in New York, and one month we read *The Seven Storey Mountain*. After our meeting an elderly woman, who had remained silent during the evening’s lively discussion, asked to speak with me. She told me that her husband had known Merton at Columbia. “My husband was so surprised when he read this book,” she said. “All he could remember of Merton was that he was always ready to go out drinking or to a party. My husband said he couldn’t believe what was going on inside Merton.”

What was going on inside of Merton was the slow

process of conversion: from an old way of life to a new one, or, more specifically, from no particular religious affiliation to a wholehearted embrace of Roman Catholicism. His autobiography reveals that his transformation happened in a number of ways. The first way was through a sort of gradual intellectual progression, as Merton searched for a system of beliefs to satisfy his natural curiosity. Professor Van Doren really did prepare his mind for scholasticism, so that when Merton came across a text called *The Spirit of Medieval Philosophy* by Étienne Gilson, its scholastic approach to the question of God’s existence made a “profound impression” on him. So Merton’s first way to God was through the intellect.

Merton’s second path to conversion was through the senses and, especially, through art. This too happened gradually. The son of two artists, Merton was acutely aware of his surroundings, and during Merton’s early life God spoke to him through the physical world—and Merton gradually

became *aware* that God was doing so. As a baby boy, for example, Merton flipped through a picture book of monasteries and, captivated by their beauty, was “filled with a kind of longing.” Years later, during an extended trip through Europe, he was “fascinated” by the Byzantine mosaics and religious art in Rome. God drew him closer in this way as well. “And thus without knowing anything about it,” he wrote, “I became a pilgrim. I was unconsciously and unintentionally visiting all the great shrines of Rome, and seeking out their sanctuaries with some of the eagerness and avidity and desire of a true pilgrim, though not quite for the right reason.”

Finally, God drew Merton in through his emotions. From his relationship with the Privats, to his stolen prayers in a church in Rome, to a surprising moment beside the bed of his dying grandfather, when he felt the urge to fall to his knees and pray, Merton was drawn inexorably closer to God through the intimate workings of his emotional life.

Thomas Merton’s conversion occurred gradually, yet in my first reading of his book it seemed to happen all at once: Merton discovered Scholastic philosophy; he attended a Mass at a nearby church; and—*bang!*—a few pages later, he was baptized as a Roman Catholic at Corpus Christi Church near Columbia University. In what I saw as his straightforward approach to changing his life, Merton appealed to me immensely. Desperate at the time to escape the bonds of my life in corporate America, I found Merton someone who knew what to do and was able to do it quickly.

His life changed even more rapidly and decisively in the years after his baptism. Once Merton graduated from Columbia and began working on a master’s degree in English, he also began considering a vocation to the priesthood. He quickly ran through a number of religious orders: the Dominicans were rejected because

What was going on inside of Merton was the slow process of conversion; from an old way of life to a new one...

they slept in common dormitories. The Benedictines were rejected because "it might just mean being nailed down to a desk in an expensive prep school in New Hampshire for the rest of my life." The Jesuits were "geared to a pitch of active intensity and military routine which were alien to my own needs." The irony in these rejections is that his eventual entrance into the Trappists would require sleeping in common dormitories more primitive than those in Dominican houses, being "nailed down" to one place for longer than most Benedictines, and living a "pitch of active intensity and military routine" far outstripping that of most Jesuits.

Only the Rule of St. Francis of Assisi appealed to Tom. Providentially, his friend Dan Walsh was familiar with the Franciscans at St. Bonaventure College in Olean, a town in upstate New York. So after finishing his master's degree at Columbia, Tom took a teaching position at the college, and in November 1939, he applied to enter the Franciscans. The following June, however, his application was rejected.

In Michael Mott's superb biography, *The Seven Mountains of Thomas Merton*, Mott conjectures that Merton's rejection by the Franciscans might have stemmed from several factors: Merton's fathering of a child, his recent conversion, and perhaps "his sense of his own unfitness." Whatever the reason, a disconsolate Tom sought solace in the confessional of a Capuchin church in Manhattan.

His confessor was unduly harsh. "The priest, probably judging that I was some emotional and unstable and stupid character, began to tell me in very strong terms that I certainly did not belong in the monastery, still less the priesthood and, in fact, gave me to understand that I was simply wasting his time and insulting the Sacrament of Penance by indulging my self-pity in his confessional." Merton emerged from this ordeal in tears.

Yet with surprising equanimity and uncharacteristic freedom, Merton accepted the decision of the Franciscans and decided to return to St. Bonaventure to work with the friars. He settled into life as a teacher and, despite the Franciscans' rejection, was increasingly drawn to living as if he were in a religious order: he prayed regularly, taught classes, and lived simply. A few months later, casting about for a place to make an Easter retreat, Tom recalled Dan Walsh's comment about a Trappist monastery in the Kentucky hills, called Our Lady of Gethsemani.

At this point in his tale, my pulse quickened: I had to keep myself from racing ahead in the book. Merton seemed on the brink of finding what he had long been searching for. I wondered why I felt that I had done the same.

Merton arrived at Gethsemani late one night and was greeted by the monastery's porter, or doorkeeper. "Have you come here to stay?" asked the blunt Trappist brother.

"The question terrified me," wrote Merton. "It

sounded too much like the voice of my own conscience."

"What's the matter?" answered the porter. "Why can't you stay? Are you married or something?"

"No," answered Merton, "I have a job."

But as soon as Merton stepped into the halls of the monastery it was clear where he had arrived. "I felt the deep, deep silence of the night," he wrote, "and of peace, and of holiness enfold me like love, like safety."

"The embrace of it, the silence! I had entered into a solitude that was an impregnable fortress. And the silence that enfolded me, spoke to me, and spoke louder and more eloquently than any voice, and in the middle of the quiet, clean-smelling room, with the moon pouring its peacefulness in through the open window, with the warm night air, I realized truly whose house that was, O glorious Mother of God!"

Merton had come home.

It took Merton a few months before he decided to enter the order. For him the monastery was the "center of all the vitality that is in America," and it exerted on him an immediate and irresistible pull.

He returned to St. Bonaventure, stunned by the force of his visit to Gethsemani, and began leading a life patterned even more closely on that of a religious community. He rose early in the morning, prayed for three-quarters of an hour, attended Mass, and did a great deal of "spiritual reading." Around this time he received a "big present...in the order of grace." He met, through her writings, St. Thérèse of Lisieux. And he discovered that "the Little Flower really was a saint and not just a mute pious little doll in the imaginations of a lot of sentimental old women. And not only was she a saint, but a great saint, one of the greatest: tremendous! I owe all kinds of public apologies and reparation for having ignored her greatness."

In a burst of enthusiasm he added: "It is a wonderful experience to discover a new saint. For God is greatly magnified and marvelous in each one of his saints: differently in each individual one."

It was almost comical to read this as I was discovering Merton. But there was a final consideration. Some months earlier Merton had been rejected by the draft board for health reasons (as a young man he had had numerous problems with his teeth). With war approaching, however, the rules were relaxed, and Merton received another letter from the draft board. He made a decision. As Michael Mott puts it in his biography, "If Gethsemani will not have him, Merton is resigned to go into the army. He is firm on one point, he will not kill, but he will serve." Merton was also resigned to doing God's will. If God wished for him to enter religious life, he would enter. If not, he would join the army. Merton had given up trying to run his life according to his own plan, preferring to let God do so instead.

In the end, to the wonder of his friends, he resigned his position at St. Bonaventure and entered the Trappists on December 10, 1941.

The remainder of *The Seven Storey Mountain* details

his life in the monastery. In short order, Merton received his novice's habit; learned about the Trappist Rule; made his temporary profession of the vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience; wrote poetry; participated in the rich liturgical life of the monastery; began his exploration of the world of contemplative prayer; and, in the process, discovered the peace he had desired all his life. "The months have gone by," he writes to God toward the end of the book, "and You have not lessened any of those desires, but You have given me peace, and I am beginning to see what it is all about. I am beginning to understand."

The Seven Storey Mountain is a beautiful book, and near the end of it I began to taste some of the peace Merton had felt. Without leaving anything behind, or leaving anything at all, I felt as if I had come home. When I finished the book late one night and set it on my nightstand, I knew with certainty that this was what I wanted to do with my life—maybe not exactly what Merton had done, and maybe not as a Trappist monk or even in a monastery, but something very nearly like it.

For me, Thomas Merton's description of religious life was an invitation to a new life. The monastic world seemed such a perfect place—peaceful and serene, full of purpose and prayer. Even then, I suspected that that was an idealized picture. (Merton later admitted as much.) And I realized that since I was desperately searching for an escape route from my current situation, any alternative would have held some appeal. Yet I also knew that, for some reason, the life that Merton described exerted a clear pull on my heart.

That's what the "call" was for me. Today many people, even believers, think that a call to the priesthood or religious life is something of an otherworldly experience—hearing voices, seeing visions. But for me it was merely a simple attraction, a heartfelt desire, a sort of emotional pull—and the happy inability to think of anything else. And once I started down that road and allowed myself to ask questions that I should have asked years ago, everything changed.

Considering those questions, which had long lain dormant in my soul, led to some surprising answers, and within two years of reading *The Seven Storey Mountain*, I entered the Jesuit novitiate.

I discovered the contours of the next several years of Merton's life in his book *The Sign of Jonas*. In some ways it is a more enjoyable work than *The Seven Storey Mountain*, since his starry-eyed fervor had worn off and he could more clearly describe the reality of religious life. The excerpts from his journals tell the tale of the first years after his entrance into the monastery until the time of his ordination, which he described as the "one great secret for which I had been born."

For the rest of his life Thomas Merton (now Father M. Louis, OCSO) wrote numerous books on the contemplative life, on nonviolence, on Cistercian life, on Christian doctrine, and on Zen, serving as a spiritual guide for millions around the world. He filled volumes

with his poetry. He maintained an extensive correspondence with writers, activists, and religious leaders of almost every stripe. He served as a master of students and, later, master of novices for his abbey. He was visited at Gethsemani by peace activists, writers, poets, artists, musicians, priests, sisters, brothers, and those who simply appreciated his outlook on the modern world. He

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fell deeply in love with a woman—a nurse he met while recuperating in a local hospital—but chose to break off the relationship and remain a monk. Eventually he was given permission to become a hermit and live in a small house on the grounds of the monastery.

And, of course, he continued to be a man of contradictions, and it was these contradictions that drew me to him. One can stand back and say, "Yes, this man of opposites, this proud and boastful monk, who was sometimes unwilling to listen to advice, sometimes overly self-absorbed, sometimes overly spiteful, was also holy. He was dedicated to God and to the church; he was helpful to so many; he was generous with his talent, time, and prayers; and he wished peace to all he met." Seeing that someone so human could be holy gives me great hope. Especially with Merton one sees both the sins and the sanctity. And I wonder if this isn't something like the way God sees us.

A final paradox: in 1968, after years of butting heads with his religious superiors, Merton was granted permission to leave the monastery for an extended trip to Asia. On his way he stopped in a place called Polonnaruwa, in Ceylon (now Sri Lanka), where he paused before immense statues of the Buddha. He was overwhelmed by a feeling of grace, of contentment, unlike any he had ever known. "Looking at these figures," he wrote, "I was suddenly, almost forcibly, jerked clean of the habitual, half-tired vision of things, and an inner clearness, clarity, as if exploding from the robes themselves, became evident and obvious." The devout Catholic monk had enjoyed a mystical experience in front of a statue of the Buddha.

A few weeks later, on December 10, 1968, in Bangkok for an ecumenical conference, Merton was taking a bath when he slipped in the bathroom, grabbed an electric fan, and was electrocuted.

And so the man who took a vow of stability in a Kentucky monastery died miles and miles away in Bangkok, called home by the One he sought in contradictions. ✕

Editors' note: Excerpt from *My Life with the Saints* by James Martin, (Loyola Press, 2006). Reprinted with permission of Loyola Press. To order copies call 1-800-621-1008 or go to www.loyolapress.com.

Merton, the CPF & the Apostolic Work of Peacemaking

The Duty is Evident

BY THE STAFF OF THE CATHOLIC PEACE FELLOWSHIP

The world first came to know Thomas Merton with the publication of his surprising best-seller, *The Seven Storey Mountain*. No doubt, the millions who read that work would have been surprised by the “radical” turns this holy monk would take later in his life. Yet CPF co-founder Jim Forest (whose reading of this and other Merton texts led him to leave the Navy as a conscientious objector and to join the Catholic Worker in New York) insists that an attentive reader of *The Seven Storey Mountain* can see the radical fire being lit. For instance, Merton explained his thoughts of enlisting in the military during the Second World War, clarifying that if he did, he could not carry a weapon:

[God] was not demanding that I pass some critical decision defining the innocence and guilt of all those concerned in the war. He was asking me to make a choice that amounted to an act of love for His truth, His goodness, His charity, His Gospel.

Merton retained this simple approach well into his radical years: He always knew that questions of war and peace that face Catholics are answered not by general statements but rather by the personal response we make in light of the Gospel truth.

Still, early seeds notwithstanding, one of the perennial questions about Merton concerns when he made the decisive move toward

active peacemaking. When did this monk become convinced of the connection between his life at Gethsemani and the violence in every corner of the world?

Perhaps the answer is precisely *on a corner*.

Many are familiar with the experience Merton had on the corner of 4th and Walnut in Louisville, Kentucky on March 18, 1958, when he was away from Gethsemani on errands downtown (today a plaque stands at the corner). This event may hold an interpretive key for his interest in peace issues that began soon after. He writes about his sudden realization in the crowd 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.” This revelation removed for him the illusion of his “world of renunciation” and “separate holy existence.” Now, he simply gloried in being human, or: “A member of the human race!” He writes in his journal:

To think that such a commonplace realization should suddenly seem like news that one holds the winning ticket in a cosmic sweepstake...There is no way of telling people that they are all walking around shining like the sun... There are no strangers! If only we could see each other (as we really are) all the time. There would be no more war, no more hatred, no more cruelty, no more greed...I suppose the big problem would

be that we would fall down and worship each other...The gate of heaven is everywhere.

Most attention has been given over the years to the rhetorical flourishes of his description, people “shining like the sun” and “the gate of heaven is everywhere.” Rightly so. These beautiful insights seem to mark Merton’s coming of age as a master teacher in the universal school of holiness to which all are called. Yet it is no accident that sandwiched between these two luminous descriptions is an Isaiah-like vision of the peaceable kingdom, a world of no-more-war. It seems Merton already had sensed that for himself and for the world, the fruit of spiritual depth is social peace. A connection was locked firmly into place.

Given the personalism described in *The Seven Storey Mountain* and the social dimension of spirituality experienced at 4th and Walnut, it is not surprising that a correspondence would soon begin between Merton and Dorothy Day, whose own witness to these values had become well-known. In a letter dated July 9, 1959 he expresses admiration for Dorothy’s recent arrest for non-participation in air raids drills. He compares her witness to Gandhi’s *satyagraha*. Then, in an early instance of an increasing sense of the depth of evil at work in the American empire, he comments that “Nowadays it is no longer a question of who is right, but who is at least not criminal.”

On September 22, 1961, Merton sent Dorothy a letter which contained an article on fear entitled, “The Root of War” which he had reworked and expanded from previous writing. The article marked a

Jim Douglass on Thomas Merton’s scope of influence:

“One thing which connected such diverse figures in the peace movement, people active on the front lines across the whole world, is that so many of them were corresponding with this monk in the hills of Kentucky.”

new and prolific period in which Merton went public for peace. He reminded Dorothy that the article had been through the censors—who were growing increasingly resistant to his writings on peace—but told her, “if you want it you can go right ahead with it.” And Dorothy did go ahead with it, right away, publishing it in the October 1961 edition of *The Catholic Worker*. In the article Merton lamented those willing to use brutal power to defend “the glorious Christian West.” “Truly,” Merton surmised, “we have entered the ‘post-Christian era’ with a vengeance.” The real need was for Christians to “become active in every possible way, mobilizing all their resources for the fight against war.” Merton was clear that such a task “implies that we are also willing to sacrifice and restrain our own instinct for violence and aggressiveness in our relations with other people.” Merton concluded with a sober admission: “We may never succeed in this campaign but whether we succeed or not, the duty is evident.”

He was speaking Dorothy’s language of faithfulness over effectiveness. Yet he knew that this was not the language of Catholic America. And thus, after the publication of

Daniel Berrigan on lessons learned from Merton:

“Merton’s ‘great contribution to the religious left,...was to gather us for days of prayer and discussion of the sacramental life. He told us, “Stay with these, stay with these, these are your tools and discipline and these are your strengths.” [...] He said you are not going to survive America unless you are faithful to your discipline and tradition.”

—from “Daniel Berrigan: Forty Years After Catonsville” by Chris Hedges in *The Nation* May 20, 2008

“The Root of War” in *The Catholic Worker*, Merton knew he had passed a point of no return. He wrote in his journal on October 23, 1961:

I am perhaps at the turning point of my spiritual life...Walking into a known and definite battle. May God protect me in it. *The Catholic Worker* sent out a press release about my article, which may have many reactions...I am one of the few Catholic priests in the country who has come out unequivocally for a completely intransigent fight for the abolition of war and the use of nonviolent means to settle international conflicts.

The ensuing years did bring hostile reactions, most notably from his own superiors and censors in the Trappist order. Their blocking

efforts led him to publish in *The Catholic Worker* under pseudonyms such as Benedict Monk (Moore) and Marco J. Frisbee. Censorship battles also led to his releasing an important work by means of mimeographed pages sent to friends. *Cold War Letters* compiled some hundred-plus missives that addressed the urgent issues raised by the specter of nuclear violence that lay over the period, especially given the near-miss of the Cuban Missile Crisis in 1962 (an episode of history closely examined in a recent book by Jim Douglass entitled *JFK and the Unspeakable*). Merton also released a mimeographed text, *Peace in the Post-Christian Era*.

During these years Merton not only skewered the diabolical logic of the world’s warmakers and war profiteers, he also served as what Jim Forest calls “a pastor to peacemakers.” In this role, he warned that “nonviolence may tend to harden opposition” and that “the martyr for the right sometimes thrives on making his persecutors terribly and visibly wrong” and thus “drive them in desperation to be wrong” and “to seek refuge in violence.”

In these early years of the 1960s when Merton was in such vigorous correspondence with Forest, Day and other peacemakers, there was no formal Catholic Peace Fellowship organization. One group that did exist, and provided much of the context for Merton’s involvement, was the Fellowship of Reconciliation (FOR). The FOR had been trying to form an official Catholic peace fellowship, as it had with other communities of faith.

Merton’s writings during the early 1960s reflect a keen desire for more structure and organization in



October 1961 cover of the *Catholic Worker* which featured Merton’s “The Root of War”

Jim Forest on the Spiritual Roots of Protest Retreat:

"Merton's question ('By what right do we protest?') was an important one for us (CPF) to wrestle with. Protest is not an end in itself nor is it the most important aspect of peacemaking. When protest is called for, how can it be carried out in a way that makes it more likely for those with opposing views to rethink their position?"

There was also Merton's focus at the retreat on the witness of Franz Jägerstätter and, in his regard, the Church's failure [to support him]. Very important. What can we do to help the Church respond positively to those who refuse to take part either in war in general or in a particular war?"

the peace movement. Merton's very first response to the proposal that CPF be started was to affirm the need for, of all things "study kits"! In later years, he would write to CPF about the distinction between "apostolic work" and prophetic witness. And even in his earlier letters to Forest, Merton clearly saw the apostolic work as the primary need (though he does show respect for protest and a willingness to go to jail). On March 28, 1962, just as he learned of Jim's jail sentence for anti-nuclear protests in New York, he affirms Jim's eager witness but adds:

The peace movement needs more than zeal. It certainly needs to be organized on a very clear basis, and it is necessary for the people who know what they are trying to do, to be formed into a coherent nucleus who can make things clear to others.

Just a month later, after hearing more from Jim about the pell-mell pace of protests and the activist life, Merton wrote him that "the trouble with movements is that they sweep you off your feet and carry you away with the tide of activism and then you become another kind of mass man."

Still, Merton and others would have to wait until 1964 for the CPF to be organized. There was, still, the FOR. Merton was a member of the FOR, though he kept this fact from his superiors since FOR was seen as a Protestant organization (there were some Catholic members such

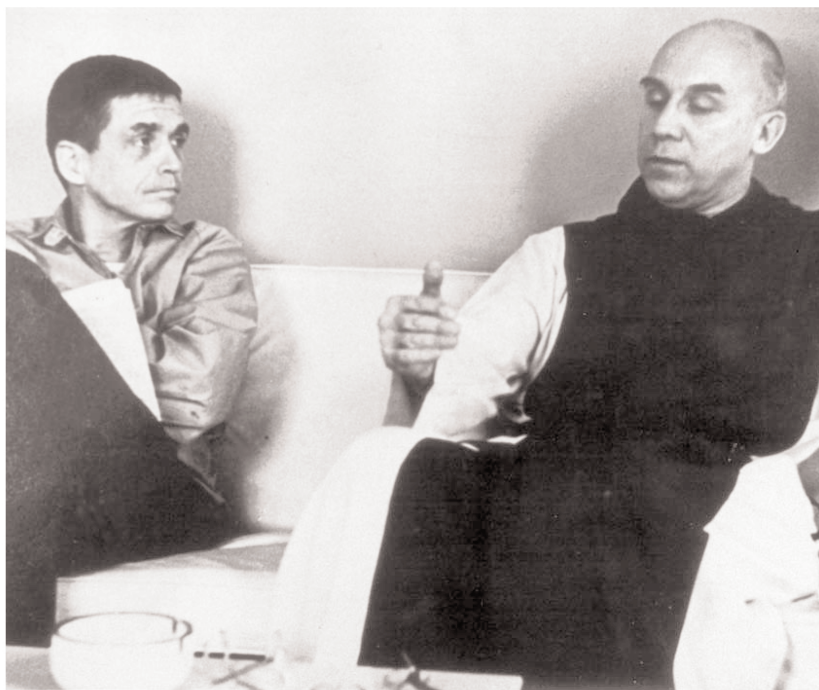
as Merton's friends Jean and Hildegard Goss-Mayr, of the International Fellowship of Reconciliation).

John Heidbrink, a Presbyterian minister who was the FOR's secretary for church relations and a frequent correspondent with Merton since 1961, wanted to help Catholics form a branch of the FOR, similar to the Jewish Peace Fellowship, Baptist Peace Fellowship and other such groups. In 1964, Heidbrink was able to secure a donation to invite a Catholic contingent to attend the International Peace Conference in Prague. It was during the time in Prague that the decision was made to begin formally the Catholic Peace Fellowship.

Upon return, Merton was among the first contacted with the news. Jim Forest asked him to be one of the sponsors listed on CPF letterhead. Merton was a bit tired of the importance of his "name," but he agreed; this was to be the last group to which he would give his name. "It is true that if one has that illusory thing, 'a name,' it might as well be used for its illusion value...I think this had better be the last illusion of this particular kind." Merton was most comfortable helping the new Catholic Peace Fellowship through personal dialogue and friendship. And it was in that spirit that he invited a group of peacemakers to Gethsemani that fall.

The plans for that gathering are interesting in themselves. For instance, on August 4, 1964, Merton wrote Dan Berrigan about the idea to gather in October:

I look forward to seeing you and John Heidbrink and a few others in October but let's make it purposeless and freewheeling and a vacation for all and let the Holy Spirit suggest anything that needs to be suggested. Let's be Quakers and the heck with projects. I am so sick, fed up



Dan Berrigan and Merton at "The Spiritual Roots of Protest" Retreat (Jim Forest/Burns Library, Boston College)

and ready to vomit with projects and hopes and expectations.

Merton here is reacting to his own struggles with religious life: censors, his desire to be allowed to be a hermit, the debates going on over the Second Vatican Council, and the fact that he is, as he tells Berrigan, “burnt out.” But as the time neared for the gathering, Merton himself proposed some structure and outlined an agenda.

The gathering finally took place from November 18-20, 1964. It seems it was something between a focused reflection and a “freewheeling” gathering. At one point, Mennonite scholar John Howard Yoder deeply impressed Merton with a talk on the “Constantinian heresy.” On the last day Phil Berrigan showed up at the gathering with two cases of beer. Others in attendance were Jim Forest, Tom Cornell, Dan Berrigan, A.J. Muste, John Nelson, and W.H. “Ping” Ferry. The theme of the retreat was “The Spiritual Roots of Protest” and, more specifically, “by what right do we protest” the violence of the world? Little did Merton know that questions about protest—draft card burnings and even self-immolation—would come in full force the following year. Or perhaps the theme was chosen precisely in anticipation of the growing resistance to the Vietnam conflict.

Another issue addressed was technology: given its increasing association with violence and manipulation, can it still “be regarded as a source of hope” or is it “by its very nature oriented to self-destruction”?

Just a few weeks after the retreat, Merton began life as a full time hermit (a period in which Merton’s connection to CPF and the peace movement continued despite his lack of access to timely information about rapidly changing events). He even writes to John Heidbrink, who was unable to attend the retreat, that “I suppose

“The issue of war is one which constitutes one of the greatest challenges to the Catholic Church, and it is one where we are called upon to decide whether or not we are really Christians.

God knows how we as a group are going to meet this.”

this retreat constitutes something of a ‘last fling’ for me. Still, throughout 1965 (his first year as a hermit) Merton kept in contact and awaited with the others the outcome of the Second Vatican Council, in particular Schema 13 of *Gaudium et spes*. Merton was hopeful, but also frustrated at an approach to war that is rooted more in secular philosophical sources than the Gospel. As he wrote to Heidbrink:

The issue of war is one which constitutes one of the great challenges to the Catholic Church, and it is one where we are called upon to decide whether or not we are really Christians. God knows how we as a group are going to meet this. Cicero won’t help us to make the grade any longer (if he ever did).

When Schema 13 of *Gaudium et spes* was approved and thus became *The Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World*, Merton (along with CPF) was pleased with several aspects. The Council strongly condemned acts of war aimed at civilian populations and urged “humane provisions for those who, for reasons of conscience, refuse to bear arms, provided that they accept

some form of service to the human community.” (GS, n.79)

The final months of 1965 also brought two other events that would dominate Merton’s relationship to CPF. In October there were draft card burnings, an act about which Merton expressed ambivalence. In a letter to Jim Douglass dated November 6, Merton reported that “at first sight, my reaction would be to say that this is an act of provocative violence...” Right away though, Merton admitted (as he did every time the subject came up) that he was simply out of the loop and lacked access to the conversation that would enable an enlightened judgment.

However, on the same day Merton wrote Jim Douglass, another event took place which went beyond the draft card burnings. Roger LaPorte, who had once been a Cistercian novice and then a Catholic Worker, set himself on fire in front of the US Mission to the UN, in protest of those being burned by American bombs in Vietnam. He died two days later. As soon as Merton learned of LaPorte’s self-immolation, he sent a telegram to CPF:

JUST HEARD ABOUT SUICIDE OF ROGER
LAPORTE. WHILE I DO NOT HOLD CATHOLIC

Tom Cornell on Merton’s approach to peacemaking:

“Merton was clear on nonviolence and did not compromise or stretch the concept to approach revolutionary violence. Some wanted him to make an explicit call to pacifism. He would not do that either. He didn’t like ideological argument and labels that separate people needlessly. He was more concerned to head off nuclear catastrophe and to instill awareness of the possibilities of active nonviolence and a commitment to it than he was in settling questions like ‘Was WWII justifiable?’ Others were pushing Merton to forsake the abbey and find his hermitage in a federal prison cell for despoiling a missile base or something. He turned that aside too.”

PEACE FELLOWSHIP RESPONSIBLE FOR THIS TRAGEDY, CURRENT DEVELOPMENTS IN PEACE MOVEMENT MAKE IT IMPOSSIBLE FOR ME TO CONTINUE AS SPONSOR OF FELLOWSHIP. PLEASE REMOVE MY NAME FROM LIST OF SPONSORS.
THOMAS MERTON.

That same day he also wrote a longer letter to Jim Forest. He repeated that he knew CPF had in no way encouraged actions like this but that, nonetheless, something seemed seriously amiss in the movement: "[T]here is something radically wrong somewhere, something that is un-Christian, though I am not questioning anybody's sincerity and good will..."

Within a week, Merton reversed his decision to resign as a CPF sponsor. He wrote to Jim and others that his problem was that people held him responsible for all the actions of the Catholic peace movement. Moreover, his entrance into deeper solitude as a hermit rendered him unfit to keep up with the day to day volatilities of resistance to the war. In December, Merton issued a statement through CPF to make clear that he was still a sponsor of CPF but also that he was now a hermit. In the statement he tried to clarify his complex (and still developing) thoughts on provocative actions of civil disobedience:

[W]hat we need most of all today is patient, constructive and pastoral work rather than acts of defiance which antagonize the average person without enlightening him.

Over the next three years, Merton remained skeptical about such actions. Even when asked by Dan Berrigan, whom he admired very much, for advice and counsel on moving toward dramatic actions and civil disobedience, Merton supported Dan, but explained that he

(Merton) simply saw things differently and was taking a different path. Merton's disinclination toward draft card burnings and other such acts led him to greater affirmation and support for the work of CPF.

In his final years Merton continued to offer CPF writings and advice. In 1966 he gave to CPF an

Within a week Merton reversed his decision to resign as a CPF sponsor. He wrote...that his problem was that people held him responsible for all the actions of the Catholic peace movement. Moreover, his entrance into deeper solitude as a hermit rendered him unfit to keep up with the day to day volatilities of resistance to the war.

essay "Blessed are the Meek" (which is reprinted in this issue). This became one of CPF's signature booklets and helped solidify the educational aim that CPF holds to this day. In 1967 he encouraged CPF to disseminate "fundamental" information about papal encyclicals, *Gaudium et spes*, and the witness of Franz Jägerstätter. In 1968 he offered his continued services, as he wrote at one point "by letter or otherwise, helping individual COs with advice."

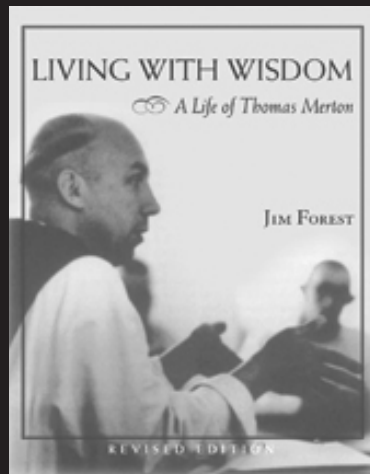
Much of the advice Merton offered to CPF in his last years was summed up in a long letter to Jim Forest, on December 29, 1965, known by many as the "Letter to a Young Activist," (for more on this letter see *The Sign of Peace*, Vol. 1.2). In this letter Merton advised Forest, "Do not depend on the hope of results," and pointed him deeper into "the reality of personal relationships" which, he explained, ultimately "saves everything." Elsewhere in the letter, Merton addressed the increase in protest actions and even expressed admiration for their "prophetic quality."

He contrasted these efforts with the task of CPF: "your more colorless and less dramatic job is apostolic: simply reaching a lot of people and helping them to change their minds." Merton was convinced that this apostolic work was the only way to have "a deep transforming effect on the American Catholic Church."

Merton's commitment to the work of CPF stemmed directly from the insight he received on 4th & Walnut: that, if we see each other "shining like the sun," if "we could see each other as we really are all the time," there would be no more war: and that this simple message needs to be brought to ordinary people through the apostolic work of catechesis, counseling, advocacy and prayer. ♫

The CPF Recommends...

for further reading on the life of Merton, see *Living With Wisdom: A Life of Thomas Merton* by Jim Forest. A new, revised edition is now available from Orbis Books.



Blessed are the Meek: The Roots of Christian Non-violence

BY THOMAS MERTON

It would be a serious mistake to regard Christian nonviolence simply as a novel tactic which is at once efficacious and even edifying, and which enables the sensitive man to participate in the struggles of the world without being dirtied with blood. Nonviolence is not simply a way of proving one's point and getting what one wants without being involved in behavior that one considers ugly and evil. Nor is it, for that matter, a means which anyone legitimately can make use of according to his fancy for any purpose whatever. To practice nonviolence for a purely selfish or arbitrary end would in fact discredit and distort the truth of nonviolent resistance.

Nonviolence is perhaps the most exacting of all forms of struggle, not only because it demands first of all that one be ready to suffer evil and even face the threat of death without violent retaliation, but because it excludes mere transient self-interest from its considerations. In a very real sense, he who practices nonviolent resistance must commit himself not to the defense of his own interests or even those of a particular group: he must commit himself to the defense of objective truth and right above all of *man*. His aim is then not simply to "prevail" or to prove that he is right and the adversary wrong, or to make the adversary give in and yield what is demanded of him.

Nor should the nonviolent resister be content to prove to *himself* that *he* is virtuous and right, and that *his* hands and heart are pure enough though the adversary's may be evil and defiled. Still less should he seek for himself the psychological gratification of upsetting the adversary's conscience and perhaps driving him to an act of bad faith and refusal of the truth. We know that our unconscious motives may, at times, make our nonviolence a form of moral aggression and even a subtle provocation designed (without awareness) to bring out the evil we hope to find in the adversary, and thus to justify ourselves in our own eyes and in the eyes of "decent people." Wherever there is a high moral ideal there is an attendant risk of pharisaism, and nonviolence is no exception. The basis of pharisaism is division: on one hand this morally or socially privileged self and the elite to which it belongs. On the other hand, the "others," the wicked, the unenlightened, whoever they may be, Communists, capitalists, colonialists, traitors, international Jewry, racists, etc.

Christian nonviolence is not built on a presupposed division, but on the basic unity of man. It is not out of

the conversion of the wicked to the good ideas of the good, but for the healing and reconciliation of man with himself, man the person and man the human family.

The nonviolent resister is not fighting simply for "his" truth or for "his" pure conscience, or for the right that is on "his side." On the contrary, both his strength and his weakness come from the fact that he is fighting for *the* truth, common to him and to the adversary, *the* right that is objective and universal. He is fighting for *everybody*.

For this very reason, as Gandhi saw, the fully consistent practice of nonviolence demands a solid metaphysical and religious basis both in being and in God. This comes *before* subjective good intentions and sincerity. For the Hindu this metaphysical basis was provided by the Vedantist doctrine of Atman, the true transcendent Self which alone is absolutely real, and before which the empirical self of the individual must be effaced in the faithful practice of *dharma*. For the Christian, the basis of nonviolence is the Gospel message of salvation for *all men* and of the Kingdom of God to which *all* are summoned. The disciple of Christ, he who has heard the good news, the announcement of the Lord's coming and of His victory, and is aware of the definitive establishment of the Kingdom, proves his faith by the gift of his whole self to the Lord in order that *all* may enter the Kingdom. This Christian discipleship entails a certain way of acting, a *politeia*, a *conservatio*, which is proper to the Kingdom.

The great historical event, the coming of the Kingdom, is made clear and is "realized" in proportion as Christians themselves live the life of the Kingdom in the circumstances of their own place and time. The saving grace of God in the Lord Jesus is proclaimed to man existentially in the love, the openness, the simplicity, the humility and the self-sacrifice of Christians. By their example, of a truly Christian understanding of the world, expressed in living and active application of the Christian faith to the human problems of their own time, Christians manifest the love of Christ for men (John 13:35, 17:21), and by that fact make him visibly present in the world. The religious basis of Christian nonviolence is then faith in Christ the Redeemer and obedience to his demand to love and manifest himself in us by a certain manner of acting in the world and in relation to other men. This obedience enables us to live as true citizens of the Kingdom, in which the divine mercy, the grace, favor and redeeming love of God are

active in our lives. Then the Holy Spirit will indeed “rest upon us” and act in us, not for our own good alone but for God and his Kingdom. And if the Spirit dwells in us and works in us, our lives will be continuous and progressive conversion and transformation in which we also, in some measure, help to transform others and allow ourselves to be transformed by and with others in Christ.

The chief place in which this new mode of life is set forth in detail is the Sermon on the Mount. At the very beginning of this great inaugural discourse, the Lord numbers the beatitudes, which are the theological foundation of Christian nonviolence: Blessed are the poor in spirit...blessed are the meek (Matthew 5:3-4). This does not mean “blessed are they who are endowed with a tranquil temperament, who are not easily moved to anger, who are always quiet and obedient, who do not naturally resist.” Still less does it mean “blessed are they who passively submit to unjust oppression.” On the contrary, we know what the “poor in spirit” are those of whom the prophets spoke, those who in the last days will be the “humble of the earth,” that is to say the oppressed who have no human weapons to rely on and who nevertheless are true commandments of Yahweh, and who hear the voice that tells them: “Seek justice, seek humility, perhaps you will find shelter on the day of the Lord’s wrath” (Wisdom 2:3). In other words they seek justice in the power of truth and of God, not by the power of man. Note that Christian meekness, which is essential to true nonviolence, has this eschatological quality about it. It refrains from self-assertion and from violent aggression because it sees all things in the light of the great judgement. Hence it does not struggle and fight merely for this or that ephemeral gain. It struggles for the truth that the right which alone will stand in that day when all is to be tried by fire (I Corinthians 3:10-15).

Furthermore, Christian nonviolence and meekness

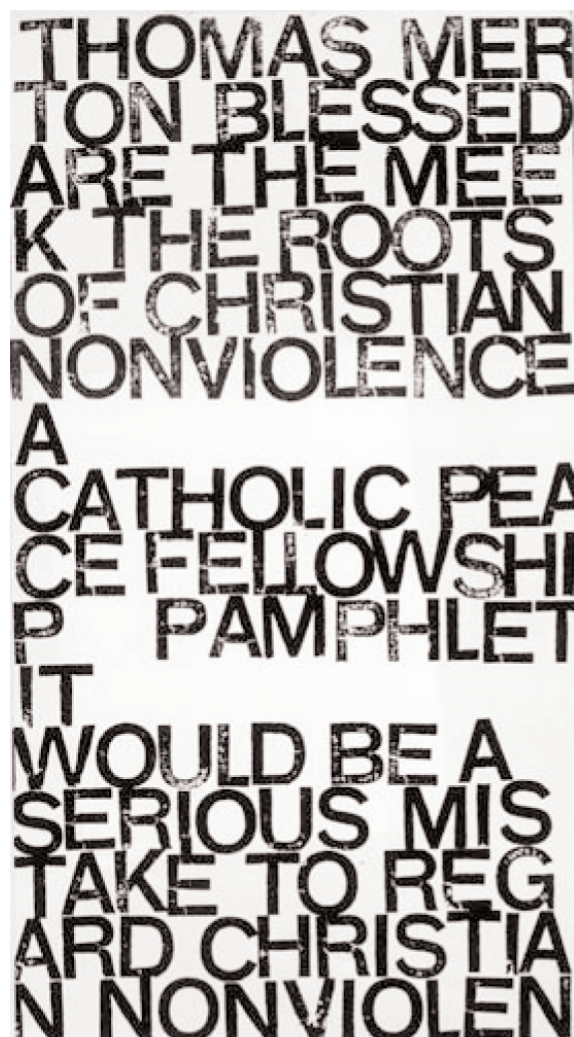
imply a particular understanding of the power of human poverty and powerlessness when they are united with the invisible strength of Christ. The Beatitudes indeed convey a profound existential understanding of the dynamic of the Kingdom of God—a dynamic made clear in the parables of the mustard seed and of the yeast. This dynamism of patient and secret growth, in belief that out of the smallest, weakest, and most insignificant seed the greatest tree will come. This is not merely a matter of blind and arbitrary faith. The early history of the Church, the record of the apostles and

martyrs remains to testify to this inherent and mysterious dynamism of the ecclesial “event” in the world of history and time. Christian nonviolence is rooted in this consciousness and this faith.

This aspect of Christian nonviolence is extremely important and it gives us the key to a proper understanding of the meekness which accepts being “without strength” (*gewatlos*) not out of masochism, quietism, defeatism or false passivity, but trusting in the strength of the Lord of truth. Indeed, we repeat, Christian nonviolence is nothing if not first of all a formal profession of faith in the Gospel message that the *Kingdom has been established* and that the Lord of truth is indeed risen and reigning over his Kingdom.

Faith of course tells us that we live in a time of eschatological struggle, facing a fierce combat which marshals all the forces of evil and darkness against the still-invisible truth, yet this combat is already decid-

ed by the victory of Christ over death and over sin. The Christian can renounce the protection of violence and risk being humble, therefore, *vulnerable*, not because he trusts in the supposed efficacy of a gentle and persuasive tactic that will disarm hatred and tame cruelty, but because he believes that the hidden power of the Gospel is demanding to be manifested in and through his own poor person. Hence in perfect obedience to the Gospel, he effaces himself and his own interests and even risks his life in order to testify not simply to “the truth” in a



Cover of 1960s CPF Pamphlet by Thomas Merton

sweeping, idealistic and purely platonic sense, but to the truth that is incarnate in a concrete human situation, involving living persons whose rights are denied and whose lives are threatened.

Here it must be remarked that a holy zeal for the cause of humanity in the abstract may sometimes be mere lovelessness and indifference for concrete and living human beings. When we appeal to the highest and most noble ideals, we are most easily tempted to hate and condemn those who, so we believe, are standing in the way of their realization.

Christian nonviolence does not encourage or excuse hatred of a special class, nation or social group. It is not merely *anti-this* or that. In other words, the evangelical realism which is demanded of the Christian should make it impossible for him to generalize about “the wicked” against whom he takes up moral arms in a struggle for righteousness. He will not let himself be persuaded that the adversary is totally wicked and can therefore never be reasonable or well-intentioned, and hence need to be listened to. This attitude, which defeats the very purpose of nonviolence—openness, communication, dialogue—often accounts for the fact that some acts of civil disobedience merely antagonize the adversary without making him willing to communicate in any way whatever, except with bullets or missiles. Thomas à Becket, in Eliot’s play, *Murder in the Cathedral*, debated with himself, fearing that he might be seeking martyrdom merely in order to demonstrate his own righteousness and the King’s injustice: “This is the greatest treason, to do the right thing for the wrong reason.”

Now all these principles are fine and they accord with our Christian faith. But once we view the principles in light of our current *facts*, a practical difficulty confronts us. If the “gospel is preached to the poor,” if the Christian message is essentially a message of hope and redemption for the poor, the oppressed, the underprivileged and those who have no power humanly speaking, how are we to reconcile ourselves to the fact that Christians belong for the most part to the rich and powerful nations of the earth. Seventeen percent of the world’s population control eighty percent of the world’s wealth, and most of these seventeen percent are supposedly Christian. Admittedly those Christians who are interested in nonviolence are not ordinarily the wealthy ones. Nevertheless, like it or not, they share in the power and privilege of the most wealthy and mighty society the world has ever known. Even with the best subjective intentions in the world, how can they avoid a certain ambiguity in preaching nonviolence? Is this not a mystification?

We must remember Marx’s accusation that “the social principles of Christianity encourage dullness, lack of self-respect, submissiveness, self-abasement, in short all the characteristics of the proletariat.” We must frankly face the possibility that the nonviolence of

European or American preaching Christian meekness may conceivably be adulterated by bourgeois feelings and by an unconscious desire to preserve the status quo against violent upheaval.

On the other hand, Marx’s view of Christianity is obviously tendentious and distorted. A real understanding of Christian nonviolence (backed up by the evidence of history in the Apostolic Age) shows not only that it is a *power*, but that it remains perhaps the only really effective way of transforming man and human society. After nearly fifty years of Communist revolution, we find little evidence that the world is improved by violence. Let us however seriously consider at least the *conditions* for relative honesty in the practice of Christian nonviolence.

Christian nonviolence does not encourage or excuse hatred of a special class, nation or social group. It is not merely *anti-this* or that...the evangelical realism which is demanded of the Christian should make it impossible for him to generalize about “the wicked” against whom he takes up moral arms in a struggle for righteousness.

1. Nonviolence must be aimed above all at the transformation of the present state of the world, and it must therefore be free from all occult, unconscious connivance with an unjust use of power. This poses enormous problems—for if nonviolence is too political it becomes drawn into the power struggle and identified with one side or another in that struggle, while if it is totally apolitical it runs the risk of being ineffective or at best merely symbolic.

2. The nonviolent resistance of the Christian who belongs to one of the powerful nations and who is himself in some sense a privileged member of world society will have to be clearly not for *himself* but for *others*, that is for the poor and underprivileged. (Obviously in the case of Negroes in the United States, though they may be citizens of a privileged nation, their case is different. They are clearly entitled to wage a nonviolent struggle for their rights, but even for them this struggle should be primarily for *truth itself*—this being the source of their power.)

3. In the case of nonviolent struggle for peace—the threat of nuclear war abolishes all privileges. Under the bomb there is not much distinction between rich and poor. In fact the richest nations are usually the most threatened. Nonviolence must simply avoid the ambiguity of an unclear and *confusing protest* that hardens

the warmakers in their self-righteous blindness. This means in fact that *in this case above all nonviolence must avoid a facile and fanatical self-righteousness*, and refrain from being satisfied with dramatic self-justifying gestures.

4. Perhaps the most insidious temptation to be avoided is one which is characteristic of the power structure itself: fetishism of immediate visible results. Modern society understands “possibilities” and “results” in terms of a superficial and quantitative idea of efficacy. One of the missions of Christian nonviolence is to restore a different standard of practical judgment in social conflicts. This means that the Christian humility of nonviolent action must establish itself in the minds and memories of modern man not only as *conceivable* and *possible*, but as *a desirable alternative* to what he now considers the only realistic possibility: namely political technique backed by force. Here the human dignity of nonviolence must manifest itself clearly in terms of a freedom and a nobility which are able to resist political manipulation and brute force and show them up as arbitrary, barbarous and irrational. This will not be easy. The temptation to get publicity and quick results by spectacular tricks or by forms of protest that are merely odd and provocative but whose human meaning is not clear may defeat this purpose.

5. The realism of nonviolence must be made evident by humility and self-restraint which clearly show frankness and open-mindedness and invite the adversary to serious and reasonable discussion.

Instead of trying to use the adversary as leverage for one's own effort to realize an ideal, nonviolence seeks only to enter into a dialogue with him in order to attain, together with him, the common good of *man*. Nonviolence must be realistic and concrete. Like ordinary political action, it is no more than the “art of the possible.” But precisely the advantage of nonviolence is that it has a more Christian and more humane notion of what is possible. Where the powerful believe that only power is efficacious, the nonviolent resister is persuaded of the superior efficacy of love, openness, peaceful negotiation and above all of truth. For power can guarantee the interests of some men but it can never foster the good of man. Power always pro-

tests the good of some at the expense of all the others. Only love can attain and preserve the good of all. Any claim to build the security of *all* on force is a manifest imposture.

It is here that genuine humility is of the greatest importance. Such humility, united with true Christian courage (because it is based on trust in God and not in one's own ingenuity and tenacity), is itself a way of communicating the message that one is interested only in truth and in the genuine rights of others. Conversely, our authentic interest in the common good above all will help us to be humble, and to distrust our own hidden drive to self-assertion.

6. Christian nonviolence, therefore, is convinced that the manner in which the conflict for truth is waged will itself manifest or obscure the truth. To fight for truth by dishonest, violent, inhuman, or unreasonable means would simply betray the truth one is trying to vindicate. The absolute refusal of evil or suspect means is a necessary element in the witness of nonviolence.

As Pope Paul said before the United Nations Assembly in 1965, “Men cannot be brothers if they are not humble. No matter how justified it may appear, pride provokes tensions and struggles for prestige, domination, colonialism and egoism. In a word *pride shatters brotherhood*.” He went on to say that the attempts to establish peace on the basis of violence were in fact a manifestation of human pride. “If you wish to be brothers, let the weapons fall from your hands. You cannot love with offensive weapons in your hands.”

7. A test of our sincerity in the practice of nonviolence is this: are we willing to *learn something from the adversary*? If a *new truth* is made known to us by him or through him, will we accept it? Are we willing to admit that he is not totally inhumane, wrong, unreasonable, cruel, etc.? This is important. If he sees that we are completely incapable of listening to him with an open mind, our nonviolence will have nothing to say to him except that we distrust him and seek to outwit him. Our readiness to see some good in him and to agree with some of his ideas (though tactically this might look like a weakness on our part), actually gives us power: the power of sincerity and of truth. On the other hand, if we are obviously unwilling to accept any truth that we have not first discovered and declared ourselves, we show by that very fact that we are interested not in the truth so much as in “being right.” Since the adversary is presumably interested in being right also, and in proving himself right by what he considers the superior argument of force, we end up where we started. Nonviolence has great power, provided that it really witnesses to truth and not just to self-righteousness.

The dread of being open to the ideas of others generally comes from our hidden insecurity about our own

convictions. We fear that we may be “converted”—or perverted—by a pernicious doctrine. On the other hand, if we are mature and objective in our open-mindedness, we may find that viewing things from a basically different perspective—that of our adversary—we discover our own truth in a new light and are able to understand our own ideal more realistically.

Our willingness to take *an alternative approach* to a problem will perhaps relax the obsessive fixation of the adversary on his view, which he believes is the only reasonable possibility and which he is determined to impose on everyone else by coercion.

It is refusal of alternatives—a compulsive state of mind which one might call the “ultimate complex”—which makes wars in order to force reality. The mission of Christian humility in social life is not merely to edify, but to *keep minds open to many alternatives*. The rigidity of a certain type of Christian thought has seriously impaired this capacity, which nonviolence must recover.

Needless to say, Christian humility must not be confused with a mere desire to win approval and to find reassurance by conciliating others superficially.

8. Christian hope and Christian humility are inseparable. The quality of nonviolence is decided largely by the purity of the Christian hope behind it. In its insistence on certain human values, the Second Vatican Council, following *Pacem in terris*, displayed a basically optimistic trust *in man himself*. Not that there is not wickedness in the world, but today trust in God cannot be completely divorced from a certain trust in man. The Christian knows that there are radically sound possibilities in every man, and he believes that love and grace always have the power to bring out those possibilities at the most unexpected moments.

Therefore if he has hopes that God will grant peace to the world it is because he also trusts that man, God’s creature, is not basically evil: that there is in man a potentiality for peace and order which can be realized provided the right conditions are there. The Christian will do his part in creating these conditions by preferring love and trust to hate and suspiciousness.

Obviously, once again, this “hope in man” must not be naïve. But experience itself has shown, in the last few years, how much an attitude of simplicity and openness can do to break down barriers of suspicion that had divided men for centuries.

It is therefore very important to understand that Christian humility implies not only a certain wise reserve in regard to one’s own judgments—a good sense which sees that we are not always necessarily infallible in our ideas—but it also cherishes positive and trustful expectations of others. A supposed “humility” which is simply depressed about itself and about the world is usually a false humility. This negative, self-pitying “humility” may cling desperately to dark and apocalyp-

tic expectations, and refuse to let go of them. It is secretly convinced that only tragedy and evil can possibly come from our present world situation.

This secret conviction cannot be kept hidden. It will manifest itself in our attitudes, in our social action and in our protest. It will show that in fact we despair of reasonable dialogue with anyone. It will show that we expect only the worst. Our action seeks only to block or frustrate the adversary in

some way. A protest that from the start declares itself to be in despair is hardly likely to have valuable results. At best it provides an outlet for the personal frustrations of the one protesting. It enables him to articulate his despair in public. This is not the function of Christian nonviolence. This pseudo-prophetic desperation has nothing to do with the beatitudes, even the third. No blessedness has been promised to those who are merely sorry for themselves.

In resume, the meekness and humility which Christ extolled in the Sermon on the Mount and which are the basis of true Christian nonviolence are inseparable from an eschatological Christian hope which is completely open to the presence of God in the world and therefore in the presence of our brother who is always seen, no matter who he may be, in the perspectives of the Kingdom. Despair is not permitted to the meek, the humble, the afflicted, the ones famished for justice, the merciful, the clean of heart and the peacemakers. All the beatitudes “hope against hope,” “bear everything, believe everything, hope for everything, endure everything.” (I Corinthians 13:7). The beatitudes are simply aspects of love. They refuse to despair of the world and abandon it to a supposedly evil fate which it has brought upon itself. Instead, like Christ himself, the Christian takes upon his own shoulders the yoke of the Savior, meek and humble of heart. This yoke is the burden of the world’s sins with all its confusions and all its problems. These sins, confusions and problems are our very own. We do not disown them.

Christian nonviolence derives its hope from the promise of Christ: “Fear not, little flock, for the Father has prepared for you a Kingdom.” (Luke 12:32)

[T]he meekness and humility which Christ extolled in the Sermon on the Mount and which are the basis of true Christian nonviolence are inseparable from an eschatological hope which is...always seen, no matter who he may be, in the perspective of the Kingdom. Despair is not permitted to the meek, the humble, the afflicted, the ones famished for justice, the merciful, the clean of heart and the peacemakers.

The hope of the Christian must be, like the hope of a child, pure and full of trust. The child is totally available in the present because he has relatively little to remember, his experience of evil is as yet brief, and his anticipation of the future does not extend far. The Christian, in his humility and faith, must be as totally available to his brother, to his world, in the present, as the child is.

[T]he humility of Christian nonviolence is at once patient and uncalculating. The chief difference between nonviolence and violence is that the latter depends entirely on its own calculations. The former depends entirely on God and His word.

But he cannot see the world with childlike innocence and simplicity unless his memory is cleared of past evils by forgiveness, and his anticipation of the future is hopefully free of craft and calculation. For this reason, the humility of Christian nonviolence is at once patient and uncalculating. The chief difference between nonviolence and violence is that the latter depends entirely on its own calculations. The former depends entirely on God and on His word.

At the same time the violent or coercive approach to the solution of human problems considers man in general, in the abstract, and according to various notions about the laws that govern his nature. In other words, it is concerned with man as subject to necessity, and it seeks out the points at which his nature is consistently vulnerable in order to coerce him physically or psychologically. Nonviolence on the other hand is based on that respect for the human person without which there is no deep and genuine Christianity. It is concerned with an appeal to the liberty and intelligence of the person insofar as he is able to transcend nature and natural necessity.

Instead of forcing a decision upon him from the outside, it invites him to arrive freely at a decision of his own, in dialogue and cooperation, and in the presence of that truth which Christian nonviolence brings into full view by its sacrificial witness. The key to nonviolence is the willingness of the nonviolent resister to suffer a certain amount of accidental evil in order to bring about a change of mind in the oppressor and awaken him to personal openness and to dialogue. A nonviolent protest that merely seeks to gain publicity and to show up the oppressor for what he is, without opening his eyes to new values, can be said to be in large part a failure. At the same time, a nonviolence which does not rise to the level of the personal, and remains confined to the consideration of nature and natural necessity, may perhaps make a deal but it cannot really make sense.

It is understandable that the Second Vatican Council, which placed such strong emphasis on the dignity of the human person and the freedom of the individual con-

science, should also have strongly approved “those who renounce the use of violence in the vindication of their rights and who resort to methods of defense which are otherwise available to weaker parties too.” (*Constitution on the Church in the Modern World*, n. 78) In such a confrontation between conflicting parties, on the level of personality, intelligence and freedom, instead of with massive weapons or with trickery and deceit, a fully human solution becomes possible. Conflict will never be abolished but a new way of solving it can become habitual. Man can then act according to the dignity of that adulthood which he is now said to have reached—and which yet remains, perhaps to be conclusively proved. One of the ways in which it can, without doubt, be proved is precisely this: man’s ability to settle conflicts by reason and arbitration instead of by slaughter and destruction.

The distinction suggested here, between two types of thought—one oriented to nature and necessity, the other to persona and freedom—calls for further study at another time. It seems to be helpful. The “nature-oriented” mind treats other human beings as objects to be manipulated in order to control the course of events and make the future for the whole human species conform to certain rather rigidly determined expectations. “Person-oriented” thinking does not lay down these draconian demands, does not seek so much to *control* as to *respond*, and to *awaken response*. It is not set on determining anyone or anything, and does not insistently demand that persons and events correspond to our own abstract ideal. All it seeks is the openness of free exchange in which reason and love have freedom of action. In such a situation the future will take care of itself. This is the truly Christian outlook. Needless to say that many otherwise serious and sincere Christians are unfortunately dominated by this “nature-thinking” which is basically legalistic and technical. They never rise to the level of authentic interpersonal relationships outside their own intimate circle. For them, even today, the idea of building peace on a foundation of war and coercion is not incongruous—it seems perfectly reasonable! ✠

Introducing...The Sign of Peace Reading Guides!

In an effort to expand the “apostolic work” of peacemaking (as advocated by Merton), we are happy to announce a new component to our journal: Reading Guides.

The Reading Guide is intended to help parishes, schools, book clubs, and interested parties facilitate reflection and discussion on *The Sign of Peace*. CPF intends that the journal be an educational and catechetical aid that edifies the Church by guiding discussion and faith formation on issues of war, peace, conscientious objection, and other topics raised in our journal.

We appreciate your thoughts on this new initiative.

Contact Aimee Shelide --574.232.2811 (or)
shelide@catholicpeacefellowship.org.

Neither Left, Nor Right

BY MICHAEL J. BAXTER

“Lord Jesus Christ, you said to your Apostles, ‘I leave you peace, my peace I give you.’ Look not on our sins but on the faith of your Church and grant us the peace and unity of your kingdom where you live forever and ever. Amen.”

So begins the rite of the sign of peace. According to the rubrics, after these words the presider greets the assembly: “The peace of the Lord be with you always.” To which the assembly responds: “And also with you.” Then comes the invitation: “Let us offer each other a sign of peace.” And then “all make an appropriate sign of peace according to local custom.”

The sign of peace is a relatively new rite to modern-day Catholics. It was brought into the liturgy after the Second Vatican Council. Many Catholics didn’t like it. One reason was that the sign of peace seemed to be a novelty and many Catholics don’t like novelty. Another reason was that it smacked of the anti-war movement in this country, which, in the mid to late sixties, was gaining momentum. The appearance of the sign of peace in the Mass seemed to be the work of Catholic opponents of the Vietnam War, whereas many Catholics, indeed most, supported the war. The tension between “hawks” and “doves” that was dividing the country did not pass over the Church. Emotions ran high. Many supporters of the Vietnam War had lived through World War II. They were of a generation that had made enormous sacrifices, had seen many family members and friends make the “ultimate sacrifice.” In their eyes, the anti-war activists did not appreciate the hardships they suffered, the losses they endured. In some cases, they were right. In any case, it seemed that the doves were tampering with the Mass, injecting into the sacred rites a political agenda; and worse in their eyes, a political agenda that was unmistakably unpatriotic. After all, patriotism, love of country, is a virtue; and the country was at war.

Catholics in the United States have a long history of supporting their nation’s wars. As they saw it, the First Amendment of the Constitution, with its prohibition of an established religion and its protection of religious freedom, guarantees that the spiritual life of the Church would be immune from governmental intrusion. In gratitude for this religious freedom, and in order to preserve it, Catholics have readily come to the defense of the nation during wartime. Catholics have long felt they have a home in the United States, so that good Catholics

could also be good citizens—and good soldiers. Thus Catholics have readily served in US wars, World War I, World War II, and the Korean War. Only during the Vietnam War did Catholics protest in considerable numbers. Many hoped that this would mark a change in the Church’s approach to war, a hope that seemed to be ratified when the bishops issued their pastoral letter on war and peace, *The Challenge of Peace* in 1983 (see the Summer 2008 issue of *The Sign of Peace*). But by 1991, in the First Gulf War, Catholics fell back into their unconditional support of the nation as it went to war. The same was true after 9/11. And, apart from the usual parade of peace movement people, the same has been true of Catholics in regard to the Iraq War.

All of which is to say that as a group, Catholics in the United States, while they enact the sign of peace at Mass each week, do not embrace the sign of peace when the nation goes to war. What would happen if they did?

Think about it. There are seventy million Catholics in the United States. A disproportionately high number of members of Congress are Catholic. Five out of nine Supreme Court justices are Catholic. Having moved out of its largely immigrant status, now the Catholic Church in the United States has “made it.” Catholics work in the highest echelons of society, business, medicine, law, academia—and the military. Among officers in the Armed Forces, Catholics number near forty percent. A third of enlisted personnel are Catholic. And in serving in the United States military, they are doing what must be done in order to defend its expanding empire: ordering and running bombing raids, torturing prisoners of war and terrorist suspects, sitting in nuclear missile silos waiting to turn the launch key on command—all in the name of “Homeland Security.”

Given the readiness of Catholics to identify the United States as their home, a question must be asked: how faithfully have we carried out Christ’s commission to bring His peace to all nations? I dare say, not very well at all.

To remedy this failure, many Catholics might be tempted to undertake a plan of political action through the power of the ballot box, the vote. Many peace-minded people viewed the presidential election of 2008 as a means of making peace in the world. Without denying the sincerity of their efforts at peacemaking, and without denying the possible impact they may have, I believe these efforts are nevertheless deeply problematic, for several reasons.

For one thing, elections are determined by party elites who are extremely wealthy or have access to a lot of money. Political agendas of candidates are severely

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limited in regard to social change. More often than not, they work to reinforce the status quo. Furthermore, in light of these limited agendas, Christ's teaching and example concerning peacemaking seems beyond the pale of realistic political possibility. The alternatives of the major parties are rarely, if ever, war and peace, but rather different strategies for waging war. Specifically, the Democratic party is hardly an "anti-war" party, as some imagine, and surely not a "peace party" in any

[T]he Catholic "right" and the Catholic "left" are each at their most compelling when criticizing each other. But both are woefully inadequate in putting forth the fullness and true depth, or heart, of Christian peacemaking.

real sense of the word. We should not forget that in October of 2002, the Democrats in Congress were instrumental in giving the Bush administration a green light for invading Iraq. Moreover, it was the Clinton administration, taking the lead of George Bush (the senior), that imposed one of the most merciless and deadly embargoes in modern history. Going further back, we should note that Jimmy Carter (the best ex-president the United States has ever had) oversaw development of the neutron bomb and reinstituted draft registration, a response to the 1980 Soviet incursion into Afghanistan. We should also think back to the Kennedy and Johnson administrations and the escalation of the war in Vietnam. My point is that the Democratic Party has regularly led us into war in recent decades, and it will do so again, if and when it will serve the interests of the elected officials of the Democratic Party. Like Republicans in power, Democrats in power see their first task as getting re-elected.

But beyond both the enormous waste of money and the lack of real choices between the two major political parties, there exists another problem with pursuing peace by means of elections, the problem of its divisive nature; not just in the nation at large—we all know that—but within the Church as well. For many complicated historical reasons, we in the Church are now afflicted with a deep division between "Democrat" and "Republican," "liberal" and "conservative," "left" and "right." These divisions are tearing apart the Catholic Church, just as they have torn apart the mainstream Protestant denominations since the end of the Second World War. This is not a coincidence, because it is the result of the absorption of those churches into the US mainstream, into the political culture of the United States. The result is that the Word of Christ gets watered down, the witness of the Church gets domesticated, so that now Catholics—good, sincere, committed Catholics—think that in order to do something about

peace, they must choose between two false alternatives.

Let me be clearer. These days, the path of peace is not to be found in the path set forth by the Democratic party, which is woefully negligent when it comes to making peace for the unborn and the terminally ill, as many conservative Catholics are quick to point out, and are right to point out. I'm no conservative, but Catholic conservatives are accurate in their criticisms of Catholic liberals on the so-called "life issues." At the same time, Catholic liberals are at *their* most accurate in their criticisms of Catholic conservatives on *other* life issues: the death penalty, economic justice, war. In other words, the Catholic "right" and the Catholic "left" are each at their most compelling when criticizing each other. But both are woefully inadequate in putting forth the fullness and true depth, or heart, of Christian peacemaking.

Given this problem, I want to direct our attention to a person whose vision of peacemaking went deeper than the conventional political classifications of Left and Right, a founding board member and mentor of the Catholic Peace Fellowship, as well as the matriarch of the Catholic Worker: Dorothy Day.

The Catholic Peace Fellowship was born out of the heart of the Catholic Worker, so it behooves us to turn to Dorothy and the words she wrote in an earlier period when the nation was likewise at war. I refer to the editorial that appeared in the January 1942 issue of *The Catholic Worker*, written just after the United States had entered the Second World War. Pearl Harbor had been attacked. The President had declared war on Japan, Germany, and other Axis Powers. Young men, like Jay Hulihan, were enlisting in the military. The nation was mobilizing for war. It must have felt then as it felt the weeks after September 11, 2001. The headline of *The Catholic Worker* read as follows: "Our country passes from undeclared to declared war. We continue our pacifist stand." And it continues, "In addition to the weapon of starvation of its enemy, our country is now using weapons of Navy, Army, Air Force, in a month of great feasts, a time of joy in Christian life, the world plunges itself still deeper into the horror of war." The text is laid out in the center columns of page one, it is presented as an open letter, but it reads like an editorial.

From this piece, I will lift out five themes which flow from the heart of Christian peacemaking and which offer to us a way out of the conventionally political approach to peacemaking (with its liberal/conservative polarizations) into deeper, more Christ-like ways of making peace. Five themes...

1. Prayerful Discernment

The editorial begins as a letter to "Fellow Workers in Christ," but right away it turns into a prayer: "Lord God, Merciful God, our Father, should we keep silent? Or should we speak? And if we speak, what shall we say?" Then comes the setting in which the prayer is offered.

Dorothy writes, "I am sitting here in the Church on Mott Street, writing this in Your presence. Out on the streets it is quiet, but You are there, too. In the Chinese. In the Italians. These neighbors we love. We love them because they are our brothers, as Christ is our Brother, and God our Father." Then she describes our dilemma: "But we have forgotten so much. We have all forgotten. And how can we know? Unless You tell us." She quotes Romans 10: "For whoever calls upon the Lord shall be saved. How then are they to call upon Him in whom they have not believed?" The Apostle Paul writes, "And how are they to believe Him Whom they have not heard, and how are they to hear if no one preaches? And how are people to preach if they are not sent?"

We should linger over this theme. A sense of mission, being sent, an apostolic identity. Day suggests that we have to remember who we are, and that we tend to forget, for we are (as the apostle Paul points out elsewhere in Romans and in other letters) lost in our sins. We are heirs to the Old Adam. Humanity was created as one, a single person, Adam. Then comes Eve, her flesh taken from Adam, the two thus united. But then comes the tragedy of the Fall, when the unity of this original human family was shattered, like a China doll, crashing onto a tile floor, breaking into a thousand pieces. First Cain and Abel are set against each other, then their heirs, so that all humanity becomes divided into tribes, nations, peoples, empires, all at war with one another. In Dorothy's time, Germans, Italians, Japanese, Americans—all home countries of the people in her neighborhood on the Lower East Side. In our time, Afghans, Iraqis, Iranians, Palestinians, Israelis, Americans. Amid this division, the mission of Christians is to recall the unity of all humanity by preaching the Gospel. "For how beautiful are the feet of those who preach the Gospel of Peace," she writes (quoting Romans 10).

Dorothy's message was carried out according to her vocation as a journalist, which was how she always described herself. "Seventy-five thousand copies of *The Catholic Worker* go out every month. *What shall we print?* We will print the words of Christ, Who is always with us,

even until the end of the world. 'Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who persecute and calumniate you, so you may be children of your father in heaven, who makes the sun to rise on the good and the evil, and sends rain on the just and the unjust.' We are at war," she continues, "a war with Japan, Germany, and Italy, but still we can repeat Christ's words, each day, holding them close in our hearts, each month printing them in the paper."

Writing—this is her vocation. What is your vocation? How do you carry it out? Each of us has a unique and personal answer, and we can only grasp that answer in prayer, by turning to God, as Dorothy turned to God, sitting there at the Church on Mott Street, before the Blessed Sacrament, scribbling notes on what to write. She writes about Christ, how the unity of all humanity is restored in Christ, the new Adam, Who reminds us that we are all brothers and sisters, family.

In the months before the invasion of Iraq, the Dominicans put out a button that many of us wore. It said, "I have family in Iraq." The Dominican family had settled in Iraq long before. French speaking. Beautiful people. Other families, too. Little Sisters of Jesus. Little Brothers of Jesus. We are all family. So many Christians in Iraq are members of our family, of our Church.

Which leads to the second theme...

2. Ecclesial Reasoning

Dorothy Day wrote her letter from an unapologetically ecclesial perspective, as a lay woman and a daughter of the Church. "What shall we print?" she asks. Then she cites the words of the pope. "We can still print what the Holy Father is saying when he speaks of total war, of mitigating the horrors of war, when he speaks of cities of refuge, of feeding Europe." She turns to Pope Pius XII, even though she was surely disappointed that none of the modern popes took the pacifist stand. Still, she uses what the Holy Father says to help Catholics remember who we are. The popes espouse just war doctrine; but embedded in just-war doctrine is a strong appeal for peace, especially in the context of the twentieth century with the onset of total war and thus the chronic violation of just war doctrine.



Dorothy Day

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Day's approach here gives us important cues. We, too, can turn to the words of our pope. In September 2002, as the prefect for the Congregation of the Doctrine of the Faith, Benedict XVI used the just war

The Church teaches that conscience is the voice of God, witnessing within to the natural law. It is available to everyone by virtue of being created in the image of God. But the Church also teaches that this voice of conscience within can be muted and garbled by sin. It can be ignored due to our dissatisfied egos, our disordered appetites and loves. It can also be distorted by social, economic, and political pressures including nationalist ideologies, which are at their most insistent in times of war.

Second Vatican Council's "Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World." We can focus on the part of that document (n. 80) that lamented the scourge of war and sternly condemned nuclear war as "a crime against God and humanity, which merits firm and unequivocal condemnation"—some of the strongest language employed by the Council. That paragraph found its way into the document due to the efforts of Catholics like Dorothy Day, along with Eileen Egan and Jim Douglass (also a founding member of the Catholic Peace Fellowship), who went to Rome, to pray, fast and lobby for it. In recent years, Mike Griffin, Tom Cornell, and Joshua Casteel of CPF went to Rome to meet with several offices and dicasteries of the Holy See, even meeting Pope Benedict himself. This is a good example of ecclesial reasoning, ecclesial mindedness.

We appeal to our tradition, represented in the statements of bishops, too, such as *The Challenge of Peace*, the US bishops' pastoral letter on war and peace. We especially look to those powerful paragraphs telling of

doctrines to criticize the Bush administration's doctrine of "preventive war" and to question the impending invasion of Iraq. And again in May 2003, just when "victory" was supposedly attained, Benedict reiterated this criticism, stating that the US invasion of Iraq was unnecessary and unjust, even suggesting further that "we should be asking ourselves whether it is permissible to speak of a 'just war'."

Like Dorothy, we can take the words of the pope, and use them to help us and the whole Church in the United States to "remember." We can also recall the words of John XXIII in *Pacem in terris*, issued on April 11, 1963; it is not a pacifist document, but one which affirmed pacifists, and conscientious objectors. We can use that document. And we can use

Gaudium et spes too, the

how Christian discipleship can often be counter-cultural (ns. 275–6). Those paragraphs are in there due to the efforts of Bishop Thomas Gumbleton. Although many parts of *The Challenge of Peace* left me less than enthused, I'll use what I can to say what needs to be said.

Many of us were more inspired by the words of another bishop, who, in his pastoral letter (issued just before the invasion of Iraq) called upon his flock not to participate in war. That letter stands as a ray of light in a dark time. The author of that letter was Bishop John Michael Botean, bishop of the Romanian Catholics in the United States, whom we thank for that powerful and encouraging letter. We must also remember another bishop, Oscar Romero, a martyr of our time, who came preaching peace. He too used the tradition to say what needed to be said.

My point is this: Catholics are seen as laboring under great thought control, waking up every morning and waiting for the orders to come emanating from Rome; but we actually don't work like that at all. We are given a tradition, authorities from the past. We try to learn from these authorities and use them to say and do what needs to be said and done. We take our authorities and use them in ways indicated by the teaching and example of Christ.

We also have the saints. As Dorothy wrote, "In times past, Europe has been a battlefield, but let us remember St. Francis, who spoke of peace. And we will remind our readers of him, too, so they will not forget. "Make me an instrument of your peace." Other saints too, such as Polycarp, Justin, and Telemachus. Soldier martyrs such as Nereus and Achilleus (feast day: May 12th) or Marcellus of Tangiers, whose relics are in the Basilica at Notre Dame (feast day: October 30).

Dorothy uses the tradition of the Church to help us remember who we are and to give us eyes to see. She uses the tradition to question other, less compelling aspects of Church tradition. There are texts and there are counter texts, she wrote in *The Long Loneliness*. She would use texts, push them in a certain direction, criticize corruptions of Catholic tradition—as a means of purifying our reasoning, startling our consciences, reminding us.

3. Supporting Conscientious Objectors

Dorothy also writes in her editorial: "Speaking for many of our conscientious objectors, we will not participate in armed warfare, or in making munitions, or by buying government bonds to prosecute the war, or in urging others in these efforts." There were 135 Catholic conscientious objectors during World War II, many whose faith was nurtured in the Catholic Worker. Out of the heart of the Catholic Worker emerged the Association of Catholic Conscientious Objectors (ACCO). One of these COs, Gordon Zahn, was a resident at Camp Simon, the camp for Catholic conscientious

objectors. Zahn told the story in a book entitled *Another Part of the War*. Later, Zahn wrote about an Austrian farmer, husband, and father by the name of Franz Jägerstätter, who refused to participate in the war waged by Nazi-dominated Austria. We know of Jägerstätter because Gordon Zahn helped us remember. And we know also of Ben Salmon, a Catholic CO during World War I, because it was reprinted in the same January 1942 issue of *The Catholic Worker*, as a way to support conscientious objectors as the nation lurched into war yet again.

At the outbreak of World War II, before the US entered into the war, Dorothy called for draft resistance and total non-cooperation. Quoting Bishop McNicholas of Cincinnati, she urged “a mighty league of Catholic conscientious objectors.” After the war, when a peacetime draft was instituted, she called on Catholics to “fill the jails!” She was calling upon Catholics to issue a collective voice for peace. That vision didn’t materialize, but this is no reason to say that it will not or cannot materialize. It could.

Twenty years later we saw this vision partially materialize. This, thanks to some of Dorothy’s disciples: Jim Forest, Tom Cornell, Jim Douglass, and so many others who have done the hard work of sitting with people, helping them to discern their consciences. This is a necessary work of the Church. The Church teaches that conscience is the voice of God, witnessing within to the natural law. It is available to everyone by virtue of being created in the image of God. But the Church also teaches that this voice of conscience within can be muted and garbled by sin. It can be ignored due to our dissatisfied egos, our disordered appetites and loves. It can also be distorted by social, economic, and political pressures—including nationalist ideologies, which are at their most insistent in times of war. As a result, although the voice of conscience can never be entirely silenced, it is hard work listening to this voice within and acting on it.

This is the work we at the Catholic Peace Fellowship have undertaken. Rooting our work solidly in Catholic tradition, we acknowledge the tradition in moral theology which holds that waging war is not intrinsically evil (this upsets some of our pacifist members). At the same time, and with the same—or greater—emphasis, we hold that waging an *unjust* war is evil. And in those cases, the call for conscientious objection is as urgent as it is concerning abortion and euthanasia—perhaps more urgent, given the way that propaganda is used to manipulate people’s passions during wartime. In this sense, the Catholic Peace Fellowship operates from within the pacifist and the strict just war traditions of the Church.

The problem is that most Catholics in the United States are neither just war nor pacifist. Most Catholics follow what John Howard Yoder called the “blank check” approach to war: waging war whenever the president or the Congress orders us to wage war. Catholics,

like so many others, pledge their allegiance to their country, right or wrong. They are obedient to their nation before all else, before the natural law, before the Divine Law, before the words and example of Christ, before conscience within. The problem is, in a word, idolatry. The nation-state has taken the place of God.

The problem is that most Catholics in the United States are neither just war nor pacifist. Most Catholics follow what John Howard Yoder called the “blank check” approach to war: waging war whenever the president or the Congress orders us to wage war. Catholics, like so many others, pledge their allegiance to their country, right or wrong.

So we have our work cut out for us. The Catholic Peace Fellowship uses as its aim and purpose Dorothy Day’s call for “a mighty league of Catholic conscientious objectors.” We use the slogan somewhat playfully, not expecting the emergence of this mighty league any time soon. But we do hope for it, and our hope is vindicated every time a soldier, sailor or airman comes forward as a conscientious objector. We have been blessed to work with people such as Joshua Casteel, former West Point cadet and interrogator at Abu Ghraib before applying for CO status and being discharged honorably from the Army. Similarly we are grateful to have Daniel Baker working at CPF. Baker, a former Navy technician who, while flying missions along the Iranian border, went to his commander declaring himself opposed to war and was honorably discharged seven months later. There are scores of others as well, who have heeded the voice of conscience within—and have acted. They show us how God’s voice is alive in our midst, how the Holy Spirit is working in history. Supported by this Spirit, we continue our work of resisting war, one person at a time.

This vision might not seem very realistic in light of “the big picture,” it might not seem “effective” in the eyes of the world. But our goal is not effectiveness, which brings up another feature of Day’s open letter.

4. Fruitfulness Over Effectiveness

In her open letter to her co-workers, Dorothy insists that they persevere in practicing the spiritual and corporal works of mercy. She writes, “As editor of *The Catholic Worker*, I would urge our friends to care for the sick and the wounded, to the growing of food for the hungry, to the continuous works of mercy in our houses and on our farms. We understand that there will be great differences in opinion, even among our own group as to how much collaboration we can have with our government in times like this. There are differences more

profound, and there will be many continuing to work with us from necessity or from choice who do not agree

[T]here were divisions in the Catholic Worker over the war. And there are divisions in the peace movement now, over how far to cooperate with the government, when to resist it, and in what manner, to what end. These are important discussions and they should go on. But they are unhelpful when they degenerate into arguments about which approach to peacemaking is most effective.

with us as to our position on war, conscientious objection, etc. But we beg that there will be mutual charity and forbearance among us all."

As we know, there were divisions in the Catholic Worker over the war. And there are divisions in the peace movement now, over how far to cooperate with the government, when to resist it, and in what manner, to what end. These are important discussions and they should go on. But they are unhelpful when they degenerate into arguments about which approach to peacemaking is most effective. Counseling soldiers, mobilizing parishes, teaching high school or college, doing civil disobedience, tax resistance—which is the most effective? We often hear this question, and often argue about it. But it is a misleading question because all these approaches are fruitful; all of them, each in their own way, are fruits of the Passion of Christ, "effects" so to speak of the Holy Spirit.

I was first exposed to the peace movement as a sophomore in high school by reading *Quotations from Chairman Jesus* by David Kirk, with an intro-

duction by a priest named Daniel Berrigan. The intro-

duction moved me to buy *The Dark Night of Resistance*. Think of Dan sitting down each morning and writing, and how fruitful it has been. Think of the fruitfulness of Dan's work in the Plowshares Movement—ineffective in one sense, yet so powerful. One person who was influenced by Dan was Ciaran O'Reilly of Ireland, an indefatigable practitioner of civil disobedience, who, in turn, has had a big effect on Michael Schorsch, who now works with Daniel Baker at CPF counseling conscientious objectors thirty hours each week, listening to people who often thank him for being there on the other end of the phone line in a time of need. John Howard Yoder once wrote a book called *The Politics of Jesus*, which has had a lasting and fruitful effect on many of us, including Margie Pfeil, who assigns it to students who will, in turn, be influenced to go out and be fruitful in their own way. Father Hugo gave "The Retreat," and Dorothy wrote about it as "the bread of the strong," and his nephew still gives the retreat now, more than a half century later. In the late sixties, Kathy Kelly heard Tom Cornell speak for the Catholic Peace Fellowship, contributing to the path she chose for herself; a path that eventually led her to Iraq to stand with people as they suffered the effects of the embargo, and later led her to found "Voices in the Wilderness," a group which has brought many others to Iraq. These are all instances of fruitfulness, derived from the fruits of the Passion and Death of Christ, all good works that lie at the heart of Christian peacemaking...

And these fruits lead back to their origin—to Dorothy Day? No. To Christ, Who gives us the gift of Peace. This brings us to the fifth and final feature of Dorothy's open letter...

5. More Prayerful Discernment

Dorothy closes her letter with this prayer: "May the Blessed Mary, Mother of love, of faith, of knowledge and of hope, pray for us." It is a prayer to Mary, the Mother of God, who here is identified also as the Mother of the theological virtues—faith, hope, and love—which are infused in our souls and received by us as a gift, through the power of the Holy Spirit. It shows that peace runs deeper than "left" and "right," and goes to the heart of each Christian peacemaker, as they ask Christ, in the words of the prayer with which we began, "Look not on our sins but on the faith of your Church and grant us the peace and unity of your kingdom where you live for ever and ever. Amen." ✠

Go On Record with CPF!
Make a statement of conscientious objection to war at:
www.WeGoOnRecord.org

Children of God in the Holy Land

BY BRENNA CUSSEN

Roughly a year ago, Elias Michael Chacour, Archbishop of the Melkite Greek Catholic Church in Galilee, announced his planned to accompany then-US President George W. Bush, on a tour of the Mount of Beatitudes. The Archbishop had hoped to appeal to Bush's Christianity, to help him see the implications of Jesus' Sermon on the Mount for US foreign policy in the Middle East. Chacour told Catholic News Service, "This is where Christ was calling on all his followers[...]to get their hands dirty, protect the poor, heal the sick, release the prisoners..."

It is a great loss that President Bush did not accept the Archbishop's invitation. If he had, he may have learned more about the hardships and joys endured by the people of Palestine, some of whom are ancestors of the very first Christians, but most of whom are currently forbidden by the Israeli government to visit the Mount of Beatitudes, located in what is now Israel. Had Bush allowed himself to hear the words of Jesus in the place in which they were first uttered—words spoken to the poor, the suffering, and those who yearn for justice—and had he met those people who are making the Beatitudes incarnate in their lives today, his heart may have been open to seeing a true path to peace.

Blessed are the poor, for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven

Both as a parish priest, and later as the Archbishop of Galilee, Chacour has worked tirelessly to bring peace to his land. Chacour condemns the bloodshed perpetrated by Palestinians and Israelis alike. Still, he is insistent that peace will only be a reality in the Holy Land when the fundamental human rights of all Palestinians are recognized.

Chacour was born in 1939 into a Palestinian Christian family in the village of Kfar Bir'im in the Upper Galilee, in what was then the British Mandate of Palestine. In November 1947, when Elias was seven years old, the UN General Assembly passed Resolution 181 to divide Palestine into two states. The Jewish people, traumatized by the Holocaust, won 56% of this land to create the new state of Israel. The Palestinian people were not consulted in the decision; although they comprised two-thirds of the population of Palestine, they were left only with a promise of a future state on the remaining 44% of the land.

In 1948, war broke out between the newly formed Israel and the disgruntled surrounding Arab nations. Palestinians across the new Israel were either forced out of their homes and villages by the Israeli military, or fled to what are now the West Bank and Gaza Strip, Lebanon, Syria, Jordan, and elsewhere. Chacour's family and neighbors were evicted from their homes by Israeli soldiers, forced to live in nearby caves for several years. Chacour's village of Bir'im, along with the majority of similarly emptied villages, was destroyed by the Israeli Army, and no longer exists today.

At the tender age of eight, Elias discovered a mass grave for the massacred bodies of families from a neighboring village. His parents, desirous that their son escape some of the hardship they saw ahead of them, and also sensing that he had a calling to the priesthood, decided to send Elias to the seminary.

Those Palestinians who, like Chacour and his family, remained inside the borders of the new State of Israel upon its creation, were eventually granted Israeli citizenship (such persons today are referred to as "Arab-Israelis"). However, the close to 750,000 other Palestinians displaced outside the borders were prevented by the new Israeli government from returning home after the war. Desperate for a Jewish-majority state, the administration feared that the presence of too many Arabs, despite their longstanding ties to the land, would outnumber (and thus outvote) the already shell-shocked Jewish population. Even after UN Resolution 194 mandated that all refugees be allowed to return to their homes and have their property restored to them, the Israeli government has continued to refuse this right to Palestinian refugees, who today number over six million. At the same time, the Israeli government grants any Jewish person automatic citizenship, including the "right to return" to Israel at any time.

The refugee issue remains one of the major obstacles to peace between Israel and Palestine. While Jewish Israelis fear the implications of a Palestinian right of return, Palestinians will accept no less than a full recognition of their human rights. As a joint letter by Palestinian Civil Society Organizations stated to the negotiating parties at Annapolis on November 26, 2007, "The fundamental rights of the Palestinian people are matters of binding international law, not political bargaining chips. Their implementation must not be left to Israel's beneficence, but rather established as the foundation of any just and durable solution to the conflict." Two days later, at a news conference to launch Pope Benedict XVI's annual message for the World Day

Brenna Cussen, a Catholic Worker and former CPF staff member has spent several months in the West Bank with the Catholic Worker and the Michigan Peace Team, promoting peace through active nonviolent resistance to the military occupation of Palestine.

of Migrants and Refugees, Cardinal Renato Martino agreed: "Palestinian refugees, like all other refugees, have a right to return to their homeland."

Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth

Refugees from the 1948 war are not the only Palestinians denied entry into Israel. The vast majority of the four million Palestinians who live in the West Bank and Gaza Strip no longer have access to the villages and cities located in the state. A barrier made of a towering 27-foot concrete wall and a series of barbed wire, electric fences, and military access roads has cut Palestinians off from both Israel and other Palestinian Territories. The construction of this "annexation wall"—whose snaking route confiscates about 10% of West Bank land for Israel—began in 2002, and is over halfway completed. When the construction of the wall is finished, Palestinians will have lost access to 46% of the West Bank, including land used by Israeli settlements east of the wall, Israeli-only roads that cut through the West Bank, and the military-controlled Jordan Valley.

Since the Israeli military began occupying the West Bank in 1967, close to 500,000 Israelis have moved there as settlers in colonies (settlements) built on stolen Palestinian land. All of these settlements, including the large blocs outside of East Jerusalem, are illegal according to international law. While some settlers are in the Palestinian Territories for economic reasons (many have been offered housing subsidies by the Israeli government), others have moved into the Occupied Palestinian Territories in order to "reclaim" all of historical Palestine for the Jewish people. Some of the more radical settlers believe that all Palestinians should either move or be removed. The Israeli settlement of Kiryat Arba in the Palestinian city of Hebron has a memorial garden dedicated to the late Dr. Baruch Goldstein, a New York born Israeli who in 1994 opened fire on Palestinian Muslims at prayer, massacring 29 people. The plaque near his grave reads, "To the holy Baruch Goldstein, who gave his life for the Jewish people, the Torah and the nation of Israel."

Although not all Israeli settlers share the beliefs of Dr. Baruch Goldstein, the mere presence of their colonies has greatly affected Palestinians' freedom within the West Bank. As more settlements connect themselves to the state of Israel and to each other by special "Israeli-only" highways, Palestinians are slowly becoming trapped inside isolated enclaves. In addition to the apartheid-style road system, Palestinians' movement within the West Bank itself is restricted by a near labyrinth of 561 closures, checkpoints, road blocks, earth mounds, trenches, and gates set up for the "safety" of Israeli settlers. However, according to the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs' October 2007 report on Palestine, "These physical obstacles...combined with the Barrier, flying checkpoints and a complex system of permits, form an integrated and coherent system that restricts the move-

ment of around 2.4 million Palestinians to their basic services, places of worship and even to their families in the West Bank."

Before the Annapolis talks of 2007, Condoleezza Rice insisted that Israelis should immediately cease all new construction on settlements. Construction did not stop. On January 6, 2008, *Haaretz*, a leading Israeli newspaper, reported, "The Housing Ministry is pushing forward with the construction of more than 1,000 residential units in East Jerusalem's Har Homa neighborhood on land held by 'absentee' Palestinians from the Bethlehem area."

At first, the absentee law allowed the State of Israel to confiscate land owned by Palestinians who had left during the 1948 war. According to this law, all Palestinians who had left, even briefly, lost their property rights. In 1967, the law was expanded to include land owned by Palestinians who had left before, during, or after the '67 war. Now, the recently constructed annexation wall limits property owners' access to land located just on the other side. Unable to reach and cultivate their land, they are declared "absentee," thus losing their legal property claims.

Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted

Rana, a Palestinian Christian and the former Director of Public Relations at Bethlehem University, moved away from Palestine with her son and husband in the fall of 2007. She left a job that she loved, and a country that she loves even more, because she could not raise her six-year-old son in a land that is brutally occupied by the Israeli military. Rana wants her child to grow up without the fear of soldiers invading his town or bulldozing his home. She wants him to be able to travel without restriction within his own country. She wants to protect him from the severe trauma suffered by a majority of Bethlehem's children—a direct result of living under military occupation.

Rana imagines Bethlehem, the birthplace of Christianity, in the year 2020: "It will no longer be recognizable as a Christian city. We, the original Christians, the ones who have kept this religion alive, will all have been forced to leave."

But she was careful when providing a reason for their exodus. "The Christians are not leaving here because of Islamic fundamentalism. Muslims are a part of my heritage, a part of who I am. We are leaving because we can't survive under Israel's military occupation."

Sadly, the Christian population of Bethlehem, the city of Christ's birth, is rapidly declining. Many Christians, generally well-educated members of the middle class, are leaving at alarming rates. In the first half of the twentieth century, Christians made up about 90% of Bethlehem's population, but in the decades following the war in 1948, they began emigrating steadily. Since the second Palestinian uprising began in 2000, and the Israeli military cracked down with overwhelming force, over 3,000 Christians have left Bethlehem.

Today, Christians make up only about a third of the population of Bethlehem, and less than 2% of all Palestinians in the West Bank. If Christians continue to leave at this rate, Bethlehem will no longer be recognizable as a Christian city.

In the five years before 2007, 400 Christian families left Bethlehem. Over 90% attributed their departure to the hardship imposed by the Israeli occupation. Although the people of Bethlehem live a mere six miles from the center of Jerusalem, most of them are unable to cross the wall that separates them from their capital. Those few residents who have obtained special permission to enter Jerusalem for work or study must pass through a giant military terminal that is guarded by barbed wire and electric fencing. Navigating the hostile maze of turnstiles, long halls, and metal detectors can take anywhere from fifteen minutes to two hours. Soldiers stationed at multiple points throughout the terminal sit behind plexi-glass windows and bark orders through a microphone, checking the identification of every Palestinian doctor, teacher, construction worker, mother, or student who requests passage. Soldiers and private security guards armed with automatic weapons patrol on the ground and observe menacingly from platforms overhead.

Although Rana is glad to escape such a situation and raise her son in a healthier environment, she is saddened at the thought that he will lose his sense of identity as a Palestinian. Rana's husband left before her to start work and establish a home for their family. "He told me he felt like he was leaving everything he ever knew. I was relieved to hear him say that, because I, too, feel defeated. Some of my friends tell me that lots of people move to new countries and start new careers. But that is their choice. I am not leaving by choice. I am leaving because I have to. My new task in life must be, then, to do what I can to bring up my son so he will always know he is Palestinian."

Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied.

Despite the seemingly desperate situation, some in the West Bank have decided to dedicate their lives to ending Israel's military occupation and the construction of the annexation wall using nonviolent resistance.

In September 2000, at the beginning of the second *intifada* (popular uprising), Rani Bournat, a resident of Bil'in village and a handsome young man in his twenties, was shot in the back of the neck by an Israeli soldier while attending a nonviolent demonstration in Ramallah. Rani no longer has the use of either of his two legs or of one of his arms, and for the rest of his life, he will have to use a wheelchair for mobility. Every Friday for the last three years, Rani, along with his father Wagi and other members of his family, has participated in a creative, powerful, and nonviolent protest against the apartheid wall that has cut the villagers of Bil'in off from 60% of their agricultural land.



Rani (Photograph by Benna Cussen)

These weekly protests are part of a larger nonviolent movement in Bil'in begun by residents three years ago, which has been widely supported by Israeli and international activists. This inspirational movement led to a September 2007 order by the Israeli High Court that the Israeli military must move the wall west and return about 250 of the 575 acres of stolen land to the villagers of Bil'in. Unfortunately, the High Court did not rule against the illegal Israeli settlement of Matiyahu East, built behind the wall on land also stolen from Bil'in. Nor has the military (at the end of 2008) yet obeyed the court order to move the wall. Thus the villagers continue to resist.

As a result of soldiers' violence against protestors in Bil'in, more than 800 people have been injured. An Israeli attorney and a Bil'in resident have both suffered permanent brain damage from rubber-coated steel bullets shot from close range. Another Palestinian has lost sight in one eye. Forty-nine Bil'in residents have been arrested, and many have suffered home-raids by the Israeli army. Some have spent months in prison with no charge. Still the resistance of the villagers of Bil'in to the military occupation has been overwhelmingly nonviolent.

Bil'in residents and their supporters have participated in about 200 nonviolent demonstrations in three years. Along with weekly marches, protestors have employed such creative tactics as chaining themselves to olive trees that are standing in the wall's path in order to prevent them from being uprooted, blocking bulldozers, erecting a small dwelling on Bil'in's confiscated land to prevent settlers from claiming it as "abandoned," and constructing a "mock wall" on top of themselves to demonstrate how the real wall is killing people.

Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called children of God.

Palestinians have been farming and shepherding the South Hebron Hills (SHH) since the end of the nineteenth century, living in homes they have built as well as in caves graciously provided by the undulating landscape. For years, the six cave-dwelling families of Tuba, a village in the SHH, were able to walk along a short road to the nearby village of Tuwani, where children

attend school and adults find transportation to the larger center of Yatta in order to buy rice, flour, and other supplies. This “short” route only took about 20 minutes to walk. However, in the year 2000, some of the most religiously ideological and physically abusive Israeli settlers in the West Bank built the radical outpost of Havot Ma’on directly across this road from the even larger settlement of Ma’on, built in 1984, making it too dangerous for Tuba’s residents to continue to travel the path. Instead, when villagers need to walk to town, they journey one or two hours each way over hills and valleys, out of the sight of settlers.

Noticing that Tuba’s children were habitually late to school, a local Palestinian leader named Hafez asked members of the Christian Peacemaker Teams (CPT), an international organization dedicated to third-party nonviolent intervention, to accompany children along the “short” road to and from school. In 2004, Israeli settlers beat two CPT accompaniers so severely that it made international news; the embarrassed Israeli government ordered its military to take over the job of escorting the children to school, a job still carried out today. Other villagers, however, do not dare to walk too close to the settlements. Fields have suffered because farmers are unable to transport the proper equipment across the hills and valleys in order to plow their land.

Frustrated with such harassment, the residents of the SHH, under Hafez’ leadership, have begun to organize a nonviolent campaign. With Hafez’s encouragement, villagers have gone through nonviolence trainings, invited Israeli and international peace activists to their homes, and led nonviolent demonstrations, one of

which resulted in the dismantling of a major roadblock, and another of which drew together 200 Palestinians, Israelis, and internationals on a march from Tuwani to Tuba. Hafez has suffered personally for his ideals. In April 2006, he was arrested, severely beaten by soldiers, and held in jail for two weeks with broken ribs.



Hafez (Photo by Benna Cussen)

Though his beating was caught on tape, Hafez has had to return to military court five times to face false accusations that he was the one who assaulted the soldiers. As of January 2008, the case had not been dropped. In December 2007, the Palestinian Authority, Hafez’ employer, tired of his absences due to nonviolence trainings or arrests, fired Hafez. And yet he continues, believing that if he is doing God’ work, the money to feed his wife and four children will come.

Blessed are you when they revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who went before you.

On Christmas Eve of 2007, Latin Patriarch and Archbishop of Jerusalem Michel Sabbah (who has under his care Hebrew Catholics and Arab Catholics of Israel, the West Bank, and Gaza) delivered a homily that met with strong negative reactions from pro-Israel groups like the Anti-Defamation League (ADL), an organization dedicated to fighting racism against the Jewish people. Sabbah spoke to the people of the Holy Land—Muslims, Jews, and Christians alike—about their responsibility to “adopt the ways of God, which are not the ways of violence.” Sabbah, aware that an enormous number of Palestinian Christians, including priests and religious, are denied entry into Israel to visit holy places like Galilee, Capernaum, Lake Tiberius, and even Jerusalem, said, “A state in this land must...respect and promote the universal vocation of the land with which it has been entrusted and, accordingly, must be open to welcoming all believers of other religions.”

Sabbah clearly understood what was needed to achieve peace: “This land of God cannot be for some a land of life and for others a land of death, exclusion, occupation or political imprisonment.” He continued, “The strong party, the one with everything in hand, the one who is imposing occupation on the other, has the obligation to see what is just for everyone and to carry it out courageously.”

Sabbah received the most criticism for his statement of opposition to one religious majority: “...in this land, which is holy for three religions and for two peoples, religious states cannot be established because they would exclude or place in an inferior position the believers of the other religions. A state that would exclude or discriminate against the other religions is not suitable for this land made holy by God for all of humanity.”

In response, the ADL said it was “deeply disturbed” Father Sabbah would politicize the holy season of Christmas by denying the Jewish people’s right to a Jewish state.” They continued, “His comments are particularly ironic considering that he represents a Catholic state and a theocratic monarchy.”

However, despite such condemnation, Sabbah, a Catholic bishop and a Palestinian, spoke what he knows to be the truth. He concluded his homily by imploring Christians in Israel and Palestine not to despair, but to remain hopeful in light of the Incarnation: “Because God is with us, we remain hopeful in the midst of all the daily difficulties we experience as a result of the occupation and of the insecurity and deprivations that arise from it. God is with us, reminding us that the commandment of love, which was given to us by Jesus, born in Bethlehem, still remains valid for the difficult times in which we are living today[...]This love consists in seeing the image of God in every human being, of every religion and nationality. It is a love that knows how to forgive and, at the same time, to demand all our rights, especially those given by God to each person and to the entire community, such as the gift of life, of dignity, of freedom, and of the land.” ✠

To Our Readers

As we at the Catholic Peace Fellowship reflect on our work in 2008, we cannot help but acknowledge the major events that have marked the past year for our nation and readers alike. Amidst a continued economic regression, millions of dollars were spent to fund political campaigns and increase military forces in the Middle East. To that end, the US was overly-ready and zealous to inaugurate President Barack Obama, whose view toward war seems (disappointedly) less and less different than the Bush administration. With Robert Gates staying on as Secretary of Defense, Hillary Clinton chosen as Secretary of State, and the retired General Jim Jones as National Security Adviser, we have a feeling that the motivational “vote for change” campaign may not yield much positive change at all. It appears likely that “change” will mean expanding the war in Afghanistan and possibly waging war in Pakistan.

Our work at CPF will continue (and likely grow) because things regarding war will not change. In 2008 we expanded our GI Rights work, with Michael Schorsch, Daniel Baker, and Shawn Storer working on the hotline. Our staff continues to grow to meet the need for a Catholic voice of peace. In August, the CPF welcomed its newest staff member, Aimee Shelide, in hopes of expanding the educational and “apostolic work” of CPF, as praised by Merton decades ago. Additionally, two CPF staff members became first-time fathers, welcoming two babies into the world. New life has a way of rendering this peace work all the more necessary and worthwhile.

Our node of the GI Rights Hotline continued to remain active through 2008. We assisted well over 500 military service members (and their family members), including 25-plus conscientious objectors. We have also started to receive a number of calls from veterans and have begun to expand our ministries to them as well. We continue to maintain our web project, WE GO ON

RECORD, which helps budding objectors maintain their CO files electronically, and may facilitate a future CO application process, especially in the case of a draft reinstatement. We continue maintaining our website and updating it with resources, current news stories involving peace work, and stories of saints and other holy men and women committed to peace. We made available a new informational booklet written by Tom Cornell on the draft, and are spreading the story of Blessed Franz Jägerstätter through the sale of beautiful icons of him. Additional resources on Jägerstätter's life are also available on our website.

A main portion of our time is devoted to the publication of this journal, *The Sign of Peace*. Beginning with our Summer 2008 issue, we have added an educational component to the journal: a guide for “CPF Reading Circles”. The Reading Guide is available to download from our website and can also be requested in hard copy via phone or email, to be mailed a few weeks following the release of an issue. We have made available more resources on Church Teaching on conscience, war, and peace, and our work was recognized and mentioned by media sources such as *America*, Indiana Public Radio, and *The Catholic Worker*. Michael Baxter, Daniel Baker, Michael Griffin, and Michael Schorsch have traveled for speaking engagements and workshops throughout the Midwest and one in the Southwest and hope to continue this work when requested.

All of this work costs money. Please remember us here at the Catholic Peace Fellowship as we continue the struggle to “raise a mighty league of Catholic conscientious objectors!”

Please consider giving to the Catholic Peace Fellowship. Donations of any size are greatly appreciated, and can be made via check or online at our website.

May the peace of Christ be with you. Thank you!

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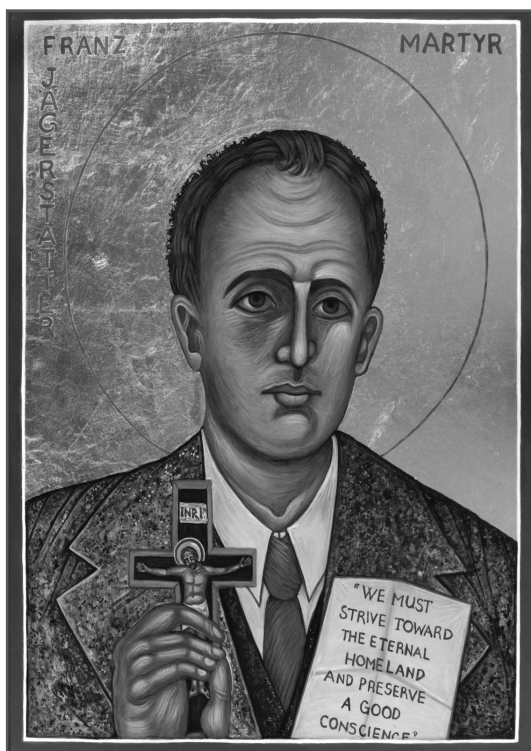
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CPF Icon of Blessed Franz Jägerstätter

The Catholic Peace Fellowship is pleased to make available for purchase icons of Blessed Franz Jägerstätter, a Catholic from Austria who was martyred on August 9, 1943 for being a conscientious objector to the Nazi army. The CPF commissioned iconographer Sharon Kolansinski in early 2008 to make this icon. Proceeds from its sale will fund the Catholic Peace Fellowship's mission to support Catholic conscientious objectors through education, counseling, and advocacy and to resist war by helping those who choose not to participate in it, one person at a time.

Currently, the CPF is offering two versions of this mounted icon. A small icon (approximately 5 x 7 inches) is available for \$20.00 + \$5.00 shipping & handling and a large icon (7.5 x 11 inches) is available for \$30.00 + \$5.00 shipping & handling. Bulk shipping rates are available upon request.

Please contact the CPF office by telephone at 574.232.2811 or by email at staff@catholicpeacefellowship.org to place an order. A color photograph of the icon can be viewed on the CPF website: www.catholicpeacefellowship.org.