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A Reluctant Pacifist: Thomas Merton and the *Cold War Letters*, October 1961 – April 1962

Thesis presented by

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for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

University College Cork

School of History

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Declaration

This is to certify that the work I am submitting is my own and has not been submitted for another degree, either at University College Cork or elsewhere. All external references and sources are clearly acknowledged and identified within the contents. I have read and understood the regulations of University College Cork concerning plagiarism.

Signature of the candidate:

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The process of researching and writing this dissertation has taught me to value conviviality as a requirement for intellectual work to be sustained and to flourish. I especially thank my supervisor, Prof. David Ryan, for providing guidance and feedback throughout the duration of this project. I thank Dr. Bettie Higgs, my dissertation mentor, for support. I gratefully acknowledge the constructive criticism of reviewers in the School of History, University College Cork. I especially wish to thank Prof. Geoffrey Roberts for reading an earlier draft of this dissertation and for providing useful feedback.

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who was one of Merton's closest correspondents from 1961 to 1968. I wish to thank Dr. Anthony Purvis for facilitating access to the Merton Collection at St. Michael's Priory, Milton Keynes. I also wish to thank Prof. Julianne Nyhan, University College London, for facilitating access to digital library collections at University College London.

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Abstract

Thomas Merton believed nuclear war was the single greatest threat facing humanity, whereas American Catholic commentators considered that nuclear war was winnable or at least survivable. What made him a reluctant pacifist was the tensions he faced between speaking frankly without being partisan. Merton had an intellectual duty to his readers to both fairly and accurately set out his position on nuclear pacifism. In order to evaluate whether he did this with integrity as a writer it is necessary to set his declared motivations against his actions and to evaluate what the tensions between his views and his actions reveal about him as a writer. Merton's pacifism is evaluated through archive research at the Thomas Merton Center, Bellarmine University in Louisville, Kentucky, and supported by a substantial secondary literature. Research for this dissertation highlights previously unacknowledged associations between Merton's Abbey of Our Lady of Gethsemani in Kentucky and radical pacifism of the Catholic Worker movement. Merton's pacifism is evaluated in five chapters through examination of his character, cloistered life, and correspondences within the institutional context of Merton's tussles with his superiors and censors in reaction to the resumption of atmospheric nuclear testing by the Soviet Union in September 1961 and the U.S. in April 1962. He represented himself through correspondence as being a writer who was committed to a central American Catholic ideal that America was good for Catholicism and Catholicism could save America. He was committed to a consistent ethics of life. The few mainstream readers who engaged with Merton's ideas were shocked and confused that he reduced political reality to symbols of moralism that rejected all war, not just nuclear war. The broader significance of Merton's pacifist writing was as a bellwether of a broader cultural shift in American Catholic life from American Catholic triumphalism to prudential judgement in the responsible exercise of the democratic life.

Dedicated to the memory of

Sister Mary Thaddeus Cronin (1914-1993)

who as a Missionary Franciscan promoted Roman Catholic values of service and social justice through education in Philadelphia, New York, New Jersey, East Boston, and Georgia, USA.

Introduction

On 20 October 1963, Henry Stuart Hughes, founder of the Massachusetts Political Action for Peace, awarded Thomas Merton its inaugural peace prize, *in absentia*, at a fundraising dinner in Cambridge, Massachusetts.[1] The event took place ten days after the Limited Test Ban Treaty came into force as the first significant agreement of the nuclear age intended to end weapons testing in the atmosphere.[2] Merton seemed an unusual choice because he was not an activist. He was a cloistered monk who had been censured in April 1962 by his religious superiors for writing as a nuclear abolitionist who believed the dangerous illusion that a world without nuclear weapons, and particularly American nuclear weapons, was desirable and that nuclear disarmament was possible.[3] Pacifists, on the other hand, constructed Merton as a martyr for conscience whose symbolic value allowed them to take the moral high ground on nuclear disarmament.

This dissertation argues that Thomas Merton believed nuclear war was the single greatest threat facing humanity, whereas American Catholic commentators considered that nuclear war was winnable or at least survivable. The association Merton made between fallout shelters and national preparations for war resulted from a combination of misinformation and his own conscientious objection to

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[1] Thomas Merton, "In Acceptance of the Pax Medal," in *The Nonviolent Alternative*, ed. Gordon Zahn (New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 1980), 257-58; John Collins, "Thomas Merton and the PAX Peace Prize," *The Merton Seasonal* 33, no.1 (Spring 2008): 3; Jim Forest, *The Root of War is Fear: Thomas Merton's Advice to Peacemakers.* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2016), 93.

[2] Henry Stuart Hughes to Thomas Merton, November 23, 1962. Section A: Correspondence, Thomas Merton Center, Bellarmine University, Louisville, KY, afterwards TMC; Merton to Henry Stuart Hughes, Cambridge, MA, May 25, 1963, Section A: Correspondence, TMC.

[3] Editorial, "Nuclear War and Responsibility," *Catholic Standard* (Washington, D.C.), March 9, 1962, 6.

war. Merton was reacting within the atmosphere of President John F. Kennedy's weak messaging on civilian nuclear preparedness that was the unintended consequence that had provoked a manufactured crisis in relation to the need for a national shelter programme in the context of the Berlin crisis in 1961. This had contributed to American public misperceptions of fallout shelters as signifying national preparations for a potential Soviet strike against the United States.

This study seeks to problematise the nature of Merton's pacifism. The title defines Merton as being a "reluctant pacifist" in so far as it evaluates his reticence to engage in politics, rather than seeking to question his principles. The red thread running throughout this dissertation is the extent to which Merton's pacifist writings are marked by a techno-scientific pessimism by which he concluded that nuclear war was not controllable. The issue at stake for Merton and religious commentators was that nuclear weapons could not be encompassed within the familiar moral world. The nature of Merton's pacifism will be evaluated in five chapters through a close examination of his character, cloistered life, and correspondences within the institutional context of Merton's tussles with his superiors and censors in reaction to the resumption of atmospheric nuclear testing by the Soviet Union in September 1961 and the U.S. in April 1962. The few mainstream readers who engaged with Merton's pacifist ideas were shocked and confused that he had reduced political reality to symbols of moralism that rejected all war, not just nuclear war.

American hegemony was founded as much on the power of its media, culture and science as on its military might. Its concept of "Freedom" as the "American Way" was built on the capability of *winning an argument*. The science of noetics, of "knowing how we know," was central to American Cold

War intellectual culture, in both its paranoid forms (counter-intelligence) and its optimistic forms, which included knowing how to demonstrate the superiority of Americanism over, say, Khrushchev's Russia.[4]

Merton expressed his Catholicity as a mode of veridiction claiming that America was good for Catholicism and that Catholicism could save America. He was arguing for religious leaders to speak out against the security-focused, consequentialist discourse in which the moral debate on nuclear weapons was framed. Merton's pacifist writings are connected to a narrative of mid-twentieth century pessimism in techno-science as diminishing the value of humanity to objects of calculation and utility.[5] Merton's pacifist writings are strongly marked by a technological anxiety, more familiar in the writings of Lewis Mumford, but based on his assumption that a technological imperative was diminishing human wisdom. Merton was arguing that nuclear strikes were better seen for the unparalleled suffering they would inflict rather than for the political purposes they served. This distinction related to an important practical consideration for Merton as to whether Catholic moralists had a duty to persuade policy makers that nuclear weapons' singular inhumanity made it inherently unethical to use them. Merton's moral objection to the policy of deterrence raised a valid question as to whether this policy made trust harder to establish between nations, but this was a question that could not be answered in the abstract, without close attention to how diplomacy actually worked.[6] Merton's view of technological determinism was less grounded in real politics than in his radical poetics.

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[4] John Hartley, "Before Ongism," in *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word*, ed. John Hartley (1982; repr. New York: Routledge, 2012), xx.

[5] Mark Greif, *The Age of the Crisis of Man: Thought and Fiction in America, 1933–1973* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2015).

[6] Bernard G. Prusak, "The Paradoxes of Deterrence: How the debate about nuclear weapons has evolved," *Commonweal* (New York) (March 2021), October 31, 2021,

Examining why Merton held the views he did will build on research by William H. Shannon,[7] Christine M. Bochen,[8] and Patricia A. Burton.[9] These scholars have made a definitive contribution to scholarship by locating the origins of Merton's pacifism during the "year of the *Cold War Letters*" as set within the political context of the fallout shelter scare.[10] Merton's "year" began for Shannon in October 1961 with the Berlin crisis and ended in October 1962 with the opening of the Second Vatican Council, and the Cuban Missile Crisis.[11] The significance of the fallout shelter scare was that it discredited any viability of a national civil defence programme as part of U.S. political and strategic aspiration of a controllable nuclear war.[12]

It was because the fallout shelter scare debated survival of American families that it provoked moral debate between religious commentators. Tension between Catholic moralists and Merton was based on the fact that moralists held to Catholic qualified acceptance of nuclear deterrence. Ultimately, just war theory conceded the possibility that even a great deal of evil, such as nuclear strikes on populated areas, may need to be endured for the pursuit of a greatly important and legitimate aim, such as survival. "These weapons," laments Michael Walzer, a prominent moral philosopher, "explode the theory of just war. They are the first of mankind's technological innovations that are simply not

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https://www.commonwealmagazine.org/paradoxes-deterrence.

[7] Merton, *A Life in Letters: The Essential Collection*, eds. William Shannon and Christine Bochen (Oxford: Lion Hudson, 2009).

[8] Merton, *Essential Writings*, ed. Christine Bochen (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2011).

[9] Merton, *Peace in the Post-Christian Era*, ed. Patricia Burton (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2006).

[10] William Shannon, *Silent Lamp: The Thomas Merton Story* (New York: Crossroad, 1992), 181-82.

[11] Ibid, 217.

[12] Fred Kaplan, *The Wizards of Armageddon* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1991), 314.

encompassable within the familiar moral world."[13] Merton appropriated the pacifism of Walter Stein, a Catholic academic at Leeds University, connected to the English Dominicans and the activities of the British Pax Society, a Catholic peace movement founded by Eric Gill, Donald Attwater, and others in 1936 as a small but influential peace society that campaigned for Catholic recognition of the right to conscientious objection.[14] The Pax Society took up the cause of trying to influence the Church to condemn the manufacture of nuclear weapons.[15] Merton was pessimistic as regards techno-science that produced nuclear weapons and he associated policies of deterrence as not preserving a precarious peace, but increasing risks of war. His pessimism was a hard technological determinism.[16] This is a reductionist theory that assumes that a society's technology determines the development of its social structure and cultural values. Merton's view betrays the historical moment of his writing in relation to the stress he placed on technological systems as conditioning both social and personal ethics.

Merton's perception that the U.S. was relying solely on nuclear weapons to defer a Soviet attack did not reflect the shift of the Kennedy administration in 1961 towards a minimum deterrence as a flexible response to the communist threat, but recalled the strategy of Massive Retaliation of the previous administration of President Dwight Eisenhower. Strategic intellectuals worked to place strategy at the service of diplomacy. Ever since the bomb became a reality it had been employed as an instrument of policy and intellectual strategists

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[13] Michael Walzer, *Just and Unjust Wars: A Moral Argument with Historical Illustrations*, 4th edn. (New York: Basic Books, 2006), 282.

[14] Jay Corrin, *Catholic Progressives in England After Vatican II* (Notre Dame, IN: Notre Dame Press, 2013), 179, 187 & 194.

[15] Brian Wicker, "Making Peace at Spode," *New Blackfriars* 62 (1981): 311-20.

[16] Phillip Thompson, *Returning to Reality: Thomas Merton's Wisdom for a Technological World* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2013).

worked to maintain this. Early in the Cold War, Bernard Brodie's mentor, University of Chicago economist Jacob Viner, drew the logical implication of his student's argument that nuclear weapons would fundamentally change the nature of international relations and so were only useful for deterrence.[17] Albert Wohlstetter bolstered Democratic critics of the Eisenhower strategy of Massive Retaliation by arguing that the United States could not depend upon the continuing invulnerability of its nuclear deterrent.[18] Lawrence Freedman has argued that the Kennedy administration's new U.S. "strategy of stable conflict" was "first propounded as official doctrine," in 1962, "at a time when the super-power relations did not seem at all stable in either political or military terms."[19] National security intellectual, Thomas Schelling was fully aware of the paradoxes of nuclear deterrence as the threat of war in the nuclear era could be classified as a bargaining process in which opponents attempted to influence each other's expectations and intentions by means of threats, promises and actions.[20] Schelling considered that nuclear weapons were sooner suited for punitive action than for conquering enemy territory.[21] If minimum deterrence was to work then completely contradictory conditions had to co-exist simultaneously.[22] To make deterrence credible, the different phases of the escalation ladder had to be completely clear to limit a potential war to a certain phase. At the same time, to achieve a deterrent effect, the phases had to remain undefined to a sufficient degree in order to exclude the risk of an actual war. A

[17] Kaplan, *The Wizards of Armageddon*, 10, 27.
[18] Albert Wohlstetter, "The Delicate Balance of Terror," *Foreign Affairs* 37, no. 2 (1959), 211-34.
[19] Lawrence Freedman, *The Evolution of Nuclear Strategy*, 2nd ed. (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 1989), 228.
[20] Thomas Schelling, *Arms and Influence*. (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1966).
[21] Freedman, *The Evolution of Nuclear Strategy*, 193-95.
[22] Ola Tunander, "The Logic of Deterrence," *Journal of Peace Research* 26, no. 4 (1989): 356.

degree of uncertainty regarding escalation was necessary for effective deterrence. Strategists worked to place strategy at the service of diplomacy, but the politics of the strategic arms race remained trapped by its technology.

The American public were not aware as to the extent of Merton's covert pacifist writings during his lifetime. Excavating this hidden history for a new generation of scholars is the focus of this study. Israel Shenker's obituary of Merton, published in the *New York Times* on 11 December 1968 represented Merton as "the Trappist monk who spoke from the world of silence to questing millions who sought God."[23] Merton's fame had been established in the American popular consciousness from the moment his autobiography, *The Seven Storey Mountain*, narrating his conversion to Roman Catholicism, as an heroic renunciation of secularism, had become a surprise American bestseller in 1948 and it has since never been out of print.[24] His publications were marked by an idealism that had everything to do with his monastic *ascesis* or way of being that espoused conversion of life. Merton, here, expressed his testimony of personal conversion and transformation that had resonances with a self-improvement philosophy that appealed to American readers.

Merton perceived the Cold War as being a moral problem that American Catholics had rhetorically reduced to the "god-fearing versus godless."[25] Merton considered this rhetoric as robbing the communist enemy of his basic humanity. By contrast, mainstream American Catholics embraced Americanism as a dimension of a top-down attempt by political elites in the United States during the early Cold War to manufacture a public consensus against the threat of

[23] Israel Shenker, "Thomas Merton Is Dead at 53; Monk Wrote of Search for God," *New York Times*, 11 December 1968, 1 & 42.
[24] Merton, *The Seven Storey Mountain* (1948; repr. London: SPCK, 2015).
[25] Dianne Kirby, "Religion and the Cold War: An Introduction," *Religion and the Cold War* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 1.

communism in American life by celebrating Christian virtue.[26] Merton regarded conversion of life as being fundamental for performances of compassionate action in the world. This ethos made him attractive to Catholic pacifists. James Forest, who was one of Merton's closest correspondents during the year of the *Cold War Letters*, observed: "In my own case, I don't know how I would have gotten through that nightmarish time without [Merton's] letters . . . These letters are really about stages of conversion."[27] Forest wrote: "One of Merton's main stresses, in my case at least, was to acquire a deeper compassion. Without compassion, he pointed out; protesters tend to become more and more centred in anger and far from contributing to anyone's conversion, can actually become an obstacle to changing the attitudes of others."[28] This is reminiscent of the Pauline metaphor of Christians putting on the "armour of God" as character formation.[29]

Cold War America's religious and secular leaders constructed religion to define U.S. culture, values, and institutions as the antithesis to those of the Soviet Union.[30] Prominent Catholic religious leaders, such as John Tracy Ellis, S.J., and John Courtney Murray, S.J., embraced Americanism and had no place for political pacifism.[31] American Catholics were never a strong institutional presence in American anti-war movements. Conscious of being a minority in an anti-Catholic milieu, and eager to be an accepted part of their society, Catholic reformers historically did not challenge the place of their nation in the international community, nor did they challenge its basic social system. As a

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[26] Jonathan Herzog, "America's Spiritual-Industrial Complex and the Policy of Revival in the Early Cold War," *Journal of Policy History* 22, no. 3 (2010): 337-65.

[27] Jim Forest, "An Army That Sheds No Blood: Thomas Merton's Response to War," *The Merton Journal 17*, no. 1 (Eastertide 2010): 18

[28] Ibid.

[29] Eph. 6:10-18 (Douay-Rheims).

[30] Jonathan Herzog, *The Spiritual-Industrial Complex: America's Religious Battle against Communism in the Early Cold War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 6-7.

[31] Benjamin Peters, "'A Completely Fresh Reappraisal of War': Americanism, Radicalism, and the Catholic Pacifism of Gordon Zahn," *American Catholic Studies* 128, no. 4 (2017): 16-17.

response, Catholic pacifists espoused withdrawal from American war-making institutions because these were impediments to fully living a Christian life based on personal conversion and social compassion. The responsibility of the United States on issues of war and peace would be one of the last issues which Catholic reformers would confront.[32]

Merton tapped into a mid-twentieth century literary culture of anxiety or "crisis of man."[33] Merton was haunted by "the long shadow" of the First World War.[34] His autobiography, *The Seven Storey Mountain*, juxtaposed his birth in France on 31 January 1915 in the middle of "a Great War" in a pen sketch as follows: "Not many hundreds of miles away from the house where I was born, they were picking up the men who rotted in the ditches among the dead horses and the ruined seventy-fives, in a forest of trees without branches along the river Marne."[35] Here, Merton described the French 75mm field guns, known as "Soixante-Quinze" used by the French to deter the Germans during August and September 1914, but that had become obsolete by 1915 because of new technologies and tactics of warfare. Merton informed his readers that he was born: "Free by nature, in the image of God, I was nevertheless the prisoner of my own violence and my own selfishness, in the image of the world into which I was born."[36] Merton, here, offers his testimony of conversion by disavowing his secular life so as to avow his monastic freedom.

Merton's perception of U.S. politics was that idolatry was legion. This manifested as celebrity over leadership, of individualism over community, of

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[32] William Au, "American Catholics and the Dilemma of War 1960-1980," *U.S Catholic Historian* 4, no. 1 (1984): 49-79.
[33] Greif, *The Age of the Crisis of Man*, 47-51.
[34] David Reynolds, *The Long Shadow: The Great War and the Twentieth Century* (London: Simon & Schuster, 2013); Appendix 1: Life and Writings of Thomas Merton (1915-1968).
[35] Merton, *The Seven Storey Mountain*, 3.
[36] Ibid.

ideology over civility, and of winning over governing. Merton chose the rhetoric of a parrhesiastes or truth-teller that was a hybrid of Old Testament prophecy and Ancient Greek *parrhesia* or frankness of speech. Jonathan Montaldo in 2014 highlighted that Merton's writings are marked by the classical rhetorical device of *parrhesia*, "defined as the right to voice a fearless, risk-taking freedom of speech. To exercise free speech, as opposed to muted and restrained speech, is a primary category in Merton's diagnosis of the inner tension in personal development."[37] Even before Merton entered monastic life he avowed a Christian pacifism in his application for partial conscientious objection in 1941. Merton avowed the following: "Catholics are bound *negatively* to avoid mortal sin, they are also bound *positively* to perfect themselves in virtue, by following the precepts of the Gospel."[38] His avowal of conscientious objection constituted a disavowal of U.S. militarism. His stance was a minority one. The Catholic Peace Fellowship estimates only 135 Roman Catholic men declared themselves conscientious objectors in America during World War II.[39] Merton, however, personally experienced the cost of war with the death of his brother, John Paul, who was shot down in a bombing raid over Mannheim in 1943.[40] Merton's entry into religious life in December 1941 exempted him from the military draft.

Merton's techno-scientific pessimism was balanced by his hopefulness in human potential. Merton described himself as "not purely American and I feel sometimes disturbed by the lack of balance in the powerful civilization of this

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[37] Jonathan Montaldo, "To Uncage His Voice: Thomas Merton's Inner Journey towards *Parrhesia*," *The Merton Seasonal* 39, no. 4 (Winter 2014): 9. On *parrhesia* as risky truth-telling see Michel Foucault, *Discourse and Truth and Parrēsia,* ed. Henri-Paul Fruchaud and Daniele Lorenzini (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2019).

[38] Merton, "Application for Conscientious Objector Status, March 1941," ed. Jim Forest, *Merton Annual*, 28 (2015): 27.

[39] Ibid, 25.

[40] Merton, *The Seven Storey Mountain*, 402-03.

country. It is technologically very strong, spiritually superficial and weak." [41] Merton did not condemn individual Americans, but rather "the irresponsibility of the society that leaves all to the interplay of human appetites, assuming that everything will adjust itself automatically for the good of all."[42] Merton reminded Dorothy Day of the Catholic Worker movement to put the dignity of the person before the strategy of the peace movement, to "rise above nature" and to "*see the person*."[43] His view reflected Thomistic "*dignitas*" to assert that human beings have dignity by virtue of what they can become not because of the simple fact that they are persons.[44] Themes of pessimism and hopefulness come together in Merton's 1966 re-evaluation of the shelter scare:

> Everything, they say, is booming. Meanwhile a man in Chicago has built himself a fallout shelter in his cellar, and declares that he and his family will occupy it, keeping out all intruders with a machine gun. This is the final exaltation of our culture: individualism, comfort, security, and to hell with everybody else. (As if other people might be interested in getting in there, being baked slowly to death by the fire storm, in warm togetherness). [45]

Here, *security* conjured up a psychology of anxiety that necessitated buttressing patriotism against the threats of a perceived enemy.[46] The point Merton was expressing through his use of the fallout shelter metaphor was that in order to live a dignified life, in addition to having access to basic needs such as food, clothing, and shelter, human beings must be given the chance to exercise virtues

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[41] Merton, "Cold War Letter #67" to Abdul Aziz" (April 4, 1962) in *Cold War Letters*, eds. Christine Bochen and William Shannon (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2006), 129.

[42] Ibid.

[43] Merton to Dorothy Day, December 20, 1961, Section A: Correspondence, TMC, typed and mimeographed as Merton, "Cold War Letter, #11 to Dorothy Day" (December 20, 1961) in *Cold War Letters*, eds., Bochen and Shannon, 33.

[44] Eleni Procopiou, "The Thomistic Perception of the Person and Human Rights," *Studia Gilsoniana* 6, no.1 (January-March 2017): 131-152.

[45] Merton, *Conjectures of a Guilty Bystander* (1966; repr., New York: Image /Doubleday, 1989), 194.

[46] David Ryan, "Necessary Constructions: The Other in the Cold War and After," in *U.S. Foreign Policy and the Other*, eds. Michael P. Cullinane and David Ryan (New York: Berghahn, 2015), 185-206.

which ennobled their nature to bring it to its highest level of flourishing. This required a social restoration of the common good.

The nature of Merton's Catholicity was fundamentally conditioned by his monastic way of being that demonstrated his commitment to a form of society and culture that was the antithesis of the political life he was seeking to confront as a writer. It was for this reason that Merton's emphasis on personal conversion as a necessary requirement for responsible action in the world is crucial for understanding how Merton perceived his contribution to Catholic pacifism as it was emerging in the United States.

Literature Review

Merton continues to be read and written about as an author who presented a contemplative perspective on the nature of the human condition.[47] This section argues that Merton's adherence to a form of Catholic pacifism, expressed through his vocational life as a monk, gave great symbolic value to his writings for pacifists seeking to place emphasis on personal integrity for political action. Merton's pacifism was unrepresentative of American Catholic opinion in 1962. Commentators writing after Merton's death in 1968 have constructed his pacifist writings as a bellwether of a broader shift in American Catholicism from Catholic triumphalism to prudential judgement in the exercise of democratic life.

The theme of Merton's pacifism as demonstrating prudential judgement for exercising democratic life is evident in early studies of Merton as a social critic. James Baker in 1971 was the first scholar to evaluate Merton's pacifist

[47] Gregory Hillis, *Man of Dialogue: Thomas Merton's Catholic Vision* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2021); Gordon Oyer, *Signs of Hope: Thomas Merton's Letters on Peace, Race, and Ecology* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis, 2021).

writing as marking his definitive turn towards social concerns after 1960.[48] Baker accounted for this as a consequence of Merton's naturalization as an American citizen from which moment he considered it his responsibility to speak truth to power in his adopted nation.[49] The theme of Baker's analysis of Merton's secular turn was a search for authenticity, but it was this that brought Merton into conflict with Catholics in Kentucky in 1968, while Baker was researching his project, because Merton was counselling a conscientious objector against military service while American Catholic sons were being drafted to fight in Vietnam.[50] Baker highlighted Merton as an American Catholic who was ready to dissent from the policies of the U.S. government if it violated his conscience.[51] This is important because Baker points readers to Merton's avowal of himself as performing a rhetorical ritual of truth-telling as a mode of veridiction against the juridical power of Catholic religiosity. Baker's study revealed Merton's own sense of his contemplative writing as being integrated into his monastic vision of personal transformation as necessary for authentic social action in the world.

Publishers marketed Merton as a writer who had heroically renounced secularism to find freedom in the cloister.[52] This is a perspective that continues to shape how Merton is written about and is received by readers. Biographers have struggled to reconcile the seemingly contradictory sides of Merton's writing life as a writer of both spiritual and secular concerns. Monica Furlong in 1980

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[48] James Baker, *Thomas Merton, Social Critic* (1971; repr., Lexington, KY: University of Kentucky Press, 2009), 28.

[49] Merton, *The Sign of Jonas* (Dublin: Clonmore & Reynolds, 1953), 312-13.

[50] Merton "Letter to James Baker" (March 28, 1968) in *The Hidden Ground of Love: Letters on Religious Experience and Social Concerns*, ed. William H. Shannon (New York: Farrar Straus & Giroux, 1985), 68.

[51] Baker, *Thomas Merton, Social Critic*, 38-39.

[52] Patricia Burton, "Mass-Market Monk: Thomas Merton in the Paperback Revolution, Part I: New American Library," *The Merton Seasonal* 39, no. 3 (Fall 2014): 3-13; Patricia Burton, "Mass-Market Monk: Thomas Merton in the Paperback Revolution, Part II," *The Merton Seasonal* 39, no. 4 (Winter 2014): 22-32.

and Michael Mott in 1984 independently evaluated Merton's pacifist writings from 1961 and 1962 as representing the moment when Merton turned from spiritual introspection towards social engagement.[53] During the 1940s and 1950s Merton retained his popularity with Americans as he wrote about his own spiritual journey through themes of contemplation,[54] monastic vocation,[55] asceticism,[56] and solitude.[57] Both Furlong and Mott were attempting to explain Merton's awareness of continuity and rupture in his life as a monk and author, while, at the same time, Catholic publishers were marketing Merton as a writer who had heroically renounced secularism by embracing his monastic vocation.

Gordon C. Zahn edited Merton's pacifist essays as a re-mapping of the moral territory of Christian pacifism. The issue for pacifists was that nuclear deterrence was a doctrine that presumed an intrinsic hostility. The just war doctrine represented, in part, an attempt to take the Christian ethical command to love enemies seriously while also acknowledging the call to justice, order, and neighbour love as well. For pacifists, this was precisely what the presumption of intrinsic hostility failed to do, and it was for that reason that Merton's pacifist writings gained popularity because he encouraged Christians in public and private life to resist the presumption of intrinsic hostility. Zahn in 1980 evaluated Merton's contribution as making Christian pacifist traditions a respectable option for Catholics since Pope John XXIII's *Pacem in Terris* ("Peace on Earth") in 1963.[58] This encyclical acknowledged the interconnectedness of the world's

[53] Michael Mott, *The Seven Mountains of Thomas Merton* (Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin, 1984), 365-380; Monica Furlong, *Merton: A Biography* (1980; repr., London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1985), 252-69.
[54] Merton, *The Ascent to Truth* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1951).
[55] Merton, *The Sign of Jonas* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1953).
[56] Merton, *Bread in the Wilderness* (New York: New Directions, 1953).
[57] Merton, *Thoughts on Solitude* (New York: Farrar Straus & Cudahy, 1958).
[58] Zahn, "Original Child Monk: An Appreciation," in *The Nonviolent Alternative*, xxvii.

peoples and the need to construct a renewed international order to foster mutual development and avoid the resort to war. Zahn first published Merton's pacifist writings when he was invited as a co-chair of Pax Christi-USA to consult with a committee of U.S. bishops who were drafting a statement regarding war and peace which would eventually become *The Challenge of Peace* in which the bishops rejected nuclear war and called upon the United States to reverse the arms race.[59] The bishops held to the norm of nuclear non-use when they wrote their pastoral letter. This American Catholic encyclical accepted Pope John XXIII's *Pacem in Terris* that placed emphasis on *positive* peace as protection from war and structural violence to foster mutual trust in international relations rather than equality of arms.[60] Zahn was a Catholic pacifist and an academic sociologist who introduced readers to Merton as being an exponent of the tradition of Christian nonviolent pacifism that was a concept of pacifism then unfamiliar to many readers, especially American Catholic readers. The priority assigned to justice as a pre-condition of genuine peace by the just war theory is reversed in the ethics of nonviolence.[61] The reversal implies that the quality of justice does not come through force of arms, but by a revolution of hearts and minds at the level of individual personal consciousness.[62] Zahn was a conduit between British and American Catholic pacifists as he performed a crucial role as an editor of Merton's pacifist writings that contributed to shaping how Merton's story as a martyr for conscience was retold by pacifist writers on both

[59] Peters, "Americanism, Radicalism, and the Catholic Pacifism of Gordon Zahn," 11.
[60] Marvin Krier Mich, *Catholic Social Teaching and Movements* (Mystic, CT: Twenty-Third Publications, 2000), 103.
[61] David Hollenbach, "Nuclear Weapons and Nuclear War: The Shape of the Catholic Debate," *Theological Studies* 43, no. 4 (1982): 584.
[62] Zahn, "Original Child Monk," in *The Nonviolent Alternative*, xxvii-xxxix.

sides of the Atlantic. The ethos of the conversion of the heart as a basis for political transformation has been of enduring interest to faith-based pacifists.

Ronald E. Powaski in 1988 was the first historian of U.S. foreign relations to represent Merton as a progressive American Catholic thinker who adhered to the Christian pacifist tradition that had been reclaimed post-Vatican II. Powaski set Merton within the *longue durée* of Catholic tradition grounded by his "contemplative stance," whereby, "Christian involvement in political action must be based on a sound and deep spiritual foundation."[63] Powaski followed Zahn's representation of Merton's political writings as emerging from the grounded experiences of living a monastic vocation.[64] Powaski's evaluation of Merton tracked the outline contours of Michael Mott in 1984 who represented Merton, within the cloister, and Dorothy Day of the Catholic Worker movement, as moderating radical impulses within Catholic pacifism.[65] Merton's unpublished pacifist writings never had the mainstream circulation that Powaski assumed in his evaluation of Merton as anticipating the peace encyclical of Pope John XXIII in 1963.[66] Powaski highlighted Merton as being at the intellectual forefront of American Catholicism. Powaski's evaluation owed an intellectual debt to Gordon Zahn who had told Merton's story as espousing freedom of conscience as advocated by a progressive Roman Catholicism after Vatican II.

For much of the twentieth century Catholic pacifism was virtually unknown to American Catholics and this is a central theme in the seminal

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[63] Ronald Powaski, *Thomas Merton on Nuclear Weapons* (Chicago, IL: Loyola University Press, 1988), xii.

[64] Raymond Studzinski, *Reading to Live: The Evolving Practice of Lectio Divina* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2009), 150; David Givey, *The Social Thought of Thomas Merton: The way of Nonviolence and Peace for the Future* (St. Paul, MN: Saint Mary's Press, 2009), 114; Lawrence Wittner, *Resisting the Bomb: A History of the World Nuclear Disarmament Movement 1954-70* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1997), 455.

[65] Mott, *The Seven Mountains of Thomas Merton*, 377.

[66] Powaski, *Thomas Merton on Nuclear Weapons*, xi; 1-27.

scholarship of Patricia McNeal in 1992.[67] Merton's engagement with pacifism in 1961 converged with initial forays and failures by James Forest at the Catholic Worker in New York to contribute to establishing the American Pax Association, predecessor to Pax Christi-USA in which Gordon Zahn played an organising role. American Pax began in New York on 28 October 1962 on the day the Cuban Missile Crisis ended.[68] Forest solidified his faith in active nonviolence by making known the fact that conscientious objection to war was an option not only for those in the historic peace churches, such as Quakers and Mennonites, but for Catholics as well. Forest was a source of information for McNeal who constructed Merton's pacifist writings as contributing to the Catholic Left.[69]

The Catholic Left contributed to Merton's political potency by telling and retelling his story as a martyr for conscience. James H. Forest has spent much of his life telling and retelling Merton's story as a peacemaker. Vanessa Cook in 2019 constructed a pantheon of "spiritual socialists" in her evaluation of the history of the radical religious left in the United States.[70] Cook includes Forest, an activist associated with the origins of the American Catholic Left.[71] Forest will play a pivotal role in the forthcoming chapters by introducing Merton through correspondence to pacifists on both sides of the Atlantic.

Personal conversion as a basis for political transformation is a particular manifestation of faith-based pacifism. Patricia McNeal in 1992 distinguished the American Catholic Left as a peace movement rather than as an anti-war

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[67] Patricia McNeal, *Harder than War: Catholic Peacemaking in Twentieth-Century America* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1992).
[68] Anne Klejment and Nancy Roberts, eds. *American Catholic Pacifism: The Influence of Dorothy Day and the Catholic Worker Movement* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1996), 128.
[69] McNeal, *Harder than War*, 277.
[70] Vanessa Cook, *Spiritual Socialists: Religion and the American Left* (Philadelphia PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2019), 9-10.
[71] Ibid, 101.

movement and the quality of this distinction is based on a faith basis shared within this movement. In the United States, conscientious objectors have always been a rare breed and were virtually unknown in Catholic America before the 1960s. John Le Brun, reviewing Patricia McNeal on her history of American Catholic pacifism, considered McNeal's treatment of Merton's Catholic pacifism as significant.[72] McNeal argued that the American Catholic Left operated within a countercultural model of Catholic Worker movement radical pacifist tradition where community, poverty, and the Gospel Beatitudes were its trademark.[73] McNeal highlighted the contribution Merton's contemplative praxis made for supporting activism through his writings that distinguished the American Catholic Left as a peace movement. McNeal's perspective on Merton was influenced by James Forest as an activist associated with the Catholic Left.[74]

Merton has received more acclaim for being a progressive Catholic writer since his death than during his lifetime. To reiterate, Gordon Zahn and Patricia McNeal have been pivotal for influencing how cultural historians have written about Merton as being an American Catholic religious persuader at the forefront of American Catholicism. Roger Lipsey in 2015 considered that Merton's correspondences with Pope John XXIII was an influence on *Pacem in Terris*.[75] Papal encyclicals are seldom, if ever, written by the pontiff without the input of others. Often these documents represent a balance or compromise between diverse interests.[76] Merton is receiving more attention in accounts of how nuclear

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[72] John Le Brun, "The American Catholic Peace Movement, 1928-1972 by Patricia F. McNeal," *The Catholic Historical Review* 66, no. 2 (April 1980), 267.
[73] Ibid, 171.
[74] Jim Forest, *Writing Straight With Crooked Lines: A Memoir* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2020).
[75] Roger Lipsey, *Make Peace before the Sun Goes Down: The Long Encounter of Thomas Merton and His Abbott, James Fox* (Boston, MA: Shanbhala, 2015), 182.
[76] Timothy McCarthy, *The Catholic Tradition: The Church in the Twentieth Century*, 2nd edn. (Eugene, Oregon: Wipe & Stock, 1998), 258.

pacifism, once at on the margins of Roman Catholicism, is now perceived by the Holy See.[77]

This dissertation departs from a dominant North American emphasis on Merton as an individual writer to situate his pacifist writings within the context of a twentieth century Catholic humanism, as a response to secular modernism, that had begun in France during the 1930s. This was exemplified by Jacques Maritain in his efforts to articulate a new humanism that provided the motivation and methodology for the personalist group spearheaded by Emmanuel Mounier and Gabriel Marcel.[78] James Farrell in 1995 proposed that Merton's reactions against nuclear proliferation from 1961 to 1962 tapped into currents of political personalism within the atmosphere of radical politics.[79] Farrell implied that Merton operated within a radical political tradition due to his sympathies with the Christian anarchism of Dorothy Day and the Catholic Worker movement as embodying an opposition to U.S. militarism through the existential threat of nuclear weapons. In reality, Day amplified communitarian Christian ethics, but played down Christian anarchism in the Catholic Worker movement because of Day's practical need to win the tacit support of Cardinal Francis Joseph Spellman of New York if the movement was to survive.[80] Christian anarchism could be interpreted as being un-American due to the fact that it espoused a belief in the abolition of all government by calling for society to be structured on

[77] Pope Francis decried the use and possession of nuclear weapons in trips to Nagasaki and Hiroshima in 2019, calling attention to failures in nuclear disarmament and arms control prior to the nuclear Non-proliferation Treaty (NPT) review conference, postponed on account of the coronavirus pandemic in 2020.

[78] Gabriel Flynn, "A Renaissance in Twentieth-Century French 'Catholic Philosophy,'" *Revista Portuguesa de Filosofia* 76, no. 4 (2020): 1576

[79] James Farrell, "Thomas Merton and the Religion of the Bomb," *Religion and American Culture* 5, no. 1 (Winter 1995): 77-98.

[80] Forest, *Writing Straight With Crooked Lines*, 125.

a voluntary, cooperative basis without recourse to force or compulsion.[81] However, when tied to Gospel personalist ethics then it became acceptable to Americans. Day placed emphasis on personalism as the basis of her Catholic Action to combat poverty, however, her commitment to social justice still had a thinly-disguised Christian anarchism as its core philosophy of mutual aid that was rooted in New Testament radicalism and the work of Russian anarchist Peter Kropotkin who argued early in the twentieth century that co-operation rather than competition was a biological evolutionary characteristic.[82] Day's personalism was orientated by an ethos of hospitality that Merton could relate to as a cloistered monk.

In summary, Merton as a peacemaker has been largely the construction of politically disenchanted faith-based pacifists at the fringes of Catholicism. The reality was very different from the construction. Catholics in 1962 ignored Merton and the desperately few readers who did engage with his ideas were shocked and confused by his nuclear pacifism. However, pacifist writers saw the value of Merton's contribution as giving a moral justification to their activism. Merton had chosen to engage with the Cold War as a moral problem and this made his writing polemical rather than analytical. Pacifist writers have been pivotal in establishing Merton as a coalition-builder who would act as a conduit between the Catholic New Left in England and the embryonic Catholic Left in the United States at a time when Roman Catholicism did not espouse pacifism.

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[81] Mary Segers, "Equality and Christian Anarchism: The Political and Social Ideas of the Catholic Worker Movement," *The Review of Politics* 40, no. 2 (April 1978): 196-230.
[82] Petr Kropotkin, *Mutual Aid: A Factor of Evolution* (1902; repr., Boston MA: Extending Horizons, 1955).

Research Methods

This section explains the research methods employed. Merton's fragmentary discussions on socio-cultural implications of technology are eclectic and unsystematic. Although Merton was a prolific writer, his social reflections were not written as sustained intellectual engagements, but rather as sketches that he revisited over many years. This makes it challenging for critics to evaluate his work. Research for this dissertation is based on archival records and published primary sources from Merton's year of the *Cold War Letters*. Research for this dissertation followed the trail William Shannon set out and involved consulting Merton's 111 letters to 81 correspondents. This correspondence is archived in the Merton Collection in Bellarmine University, Louisville, Kentucky. This archive holds fifty thousand items, with twenty thousand correspondences to over 2,100 correspondents, so Merton's correspondence from the year of the *Cold War Letters* only represents a fraction of his correspondences.

An archive does not merely designate a place, but a structuring logic. Merton, inspired by his reading of Gaston Bachelard, imagined his archive as "his own *demeures*" or sense of place where his memory would live on.[83] Merton was attuned to his subjectivity as being a work-in-progress and his self-documenting practices of journaling, letter writing, and taking photographs can all be regarded as techniques for capturing or fixating identity through fleeting moments in time and so relates to Merton's monastic *ascesis* as a continuous process of becoming. Merton lived to see his archive in formation and regarded the Merton Room in Bellarmine University and the Merton Literary Trust,

[83] Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space* (Boston, MA: 1958; repr., Beacon Press, 1994); Paul Pearson, "Thomas Merton, Archivist: Preserving His Own Memory," *U.S. Catholic Historian*, 21, no. 2 (Spring 2003): 60.

established in 1967, as means to preserve his memory. The Merton Collection in Kentucky complicates scholarly interpretations of Merton as a political pacifist because what emerges from correspondences within the archive is Merton's emphasis on personal conversion as a prerequisite for authentic political action in the world. Merton's reluctant political pacifism was a manifestation of dissonances between his confessional writing as authentic to his vocation and his partial interaction with the world.

The quality of Merton's engagement with political pacifism was not adequately examined by William H. Shannon in his treatment of Merton's efforts to justify to his interlocutors that he perceived his pacifism as not incompatible with his loyalty as an American and his faithfulness as a Catholic.[84] The primary material consulted for researching this dissertation was Merton's correspondence that filtered pacifist fears through the fallout shelter debate and the resumption of atmospheric testing as being a threat to domestic liberties. Merton did intend his "Cold War Letters" to be a title pun on the ideological chill between himself and his monastic superiors. His project consisted of 111 letters to 81 correspondents that shaped his 11 pacifist essays of which only two attracted public attention and nine were further iterations of the two published essays.[85] Shannon constructed Merton's "year" of the *Cold War Letters* around Merton's drafting of his two pivotal essays: "The Root of War is Fear"[86] and "Nuclear War and Christian Responsibility"[87] Shannon and Bochen highlight that this project represented

[84] Shannon, *Silent Lamp*, 181-82.
[85] Appendix 2: "The Year of the *Cold War Letters*, 1961-1962."
[86] Merton, "The Root of War," *The Catholic Worker* (New York), October 1961, 1; Merton, "The Shelter Ethic," *Catholic Worker* (New York), November 1961, 1 & 5.
[87] Merton, "Nuclear War and Christian Responsibility," *Commonweal* (New York), February 9, 1962, 509-513; second redraft "Peace: Christian Duties and Perspectives" unpublished in Merton's lifetime; third redraft "We Have To Make Ourselves Heard," *The Catholic Worker*, May 1962, 4-6 and *The Catholic Worker*, June 1962, 4-5 expanded as book manuscript *Peace in the Post-Christian Era* unpublished in Merton's lifetime; the fourth redraft of "Nuclear War and

Merton's reaction to the rhetoric of nuclear preparedness.[88] These scholars point to the nature of these writings as a mode of veridiction against the juridical power of the religious institution, which is argued in the forthcoming chapters.

The *Cold War Letters* project involved Merton's novice monks re-typing individual letters that were anonymised and numbered. These letters were mimeographed as copies gathered together and privately circulated by Merton within his limited correspondence circle. Merton sent out the first edition of 49 letters after his censure in April 1962 and the second edition of 111 letters that included a preface was distributed in January 1963. Merton did intend his *samizdat* writings to be a prelude to their eventual publication and a selection of this correspondence was published as "Letters in a Time of Crisis" in *Seeds of Destruction*, 1964.[89] The letters are published in separate volumes of Merton correspondence.[90] Correspondence was a way for Merton to connect with people, a way to try out new ideas, a way to reflect on his work, and a way to engage in the pertinent moral and social issues of the day.[91] Merton's correspondence was his communitarian personalism in action.

The politics of the cloister circulated around Merton steering his essay drafts through the labyrinthine process of Trappist censorship to publication that

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Christian Responsibility" was composed of the second redraft "Peace: Christian Duties and Perspectives" and the third redraft "We Have To Make Ourselves Heard" and published as "Peace: A Religious Responsibility" that formed a chapter in Merton, ed. *Breakthrough to Peace* (New York: New Directions, 1962), 88-116.

[88] Shannon, *Silent Lamp*, 215.

[89] Merton, "Letters in a Time of Crisis," in *Seeds of Destruction* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1964), 237-328.

[90] Previously published "Cold War Letters" include 37 letters in Merton, *The Hidden Ground of Love: The Letters of Thomas Merton on Religious Experience and Social Concerns*, ed. William H. Shannon (New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 1985); ten letters in Merton, *The Road to Joy*, ed. Robert Daggy (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1989); one letter in Merton, *The School of Charity*, ed. Patrick Hart (New York, NY: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1990); five letters are published in Merton, *The Courage for Truth*, ed. Christine Bochen (New York, NY: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1993).

[91] On the ethos of conviviality in Merton's letter-writing see Anthony Purvis, "I'll say a mass for Brian Epstein: The ethics of letter writing in Thomas Merton's *The Road to Joy*," *The Merton Journal* 23, no. 1 (Eastertide 2016): 40-51.

enacted a process of disciplinary dialectics between Merton and the censors because the monastic censors were the institutional gatekeepers of disciplinary knowledge and communication. Research for this dissertation revealed that American Trappists accommodated freedom to make local decisions through the principle of subsidiarity.

William Shannon did not enquire into Merton's publishing collaboration, *Breakthrough to Peace*, with James Laughlin and Wilbur Ferry that took place within the cycle of the year of the *Cold War Letters*. Research for this dissertation highlights how *Breakthrough to Peace* is crucial for understanding Merton's motivation as a pastor for the peace movement and how his ideas were received by wider audiences not considered by Shannon. It was specifically on account of *Breakthrough to Peace* that Merton was able to forge transatlantic coalitions through correspondence. Merton envisaged it as a transatlantic project with contributions from British Catholic and American intellectuals critical of the dominance of nuclear realist discourse and who reassessed the validity of an American rhetoric of nuclear preparedness from scientific, psychological, sociological, and ethical perspectives. Contributors to *Breakthrough to Peace* were selected through three-way letter correspondences between Merton, his publisher James Laughlin at New Directions in New York, and Wilbur Ferry who was vice-president of the Center for the Study of Democratic Institutions, Santa Barbara in California. This educational institution grew out of the Ford Foundation's Fund for the Republic (1951-59) that was dedicated to protecting freedom of speech and civil liberties threatened in the McCarthy era.[92] Merton's

[92] Greg Barnhisel, "James Laughlin, Robert Hutchins, and Cold War Cultural Freedom," *The Princeton University Library Chronicle* 75, no. 3 (Spring 2014): 389.

association with this circle highlighted how his writings were viewed by others as being legitimate in arguing for the moral high ground of nuclear disarmament.

In summary, Merton represented himself through correspondence as a writer who adhered to a central American Catholic view that America was good for Catholicism and Catholicism could save America. Merton, the would-be prophet, was not writing to inform readers, but to reform them so that they, in turn, would conform to a moral responsibility from his pacifist perspective.

Chapter Structure

The narrative line of the five chapters makes explicit tensions between values and actions as important for evaluating Merton's year of the *Cold War Letters* as the first and only sustained project in which Merton engaged with the politics of pacifism as personal conversion for political transformation.

Chapter one argues that Merton's emergence as a social critic in 1961 had less to do with the politics of the fallout shelter scare and more to do with his personal search to find a new relevance as a Catholic writer in modern America. This chapter is orientated by Merton's evolving sense of himself as a truth-teller or parrhesiastes that pre-dated, yet defined, the *Cold War Letters* project. Merton's truth-telling was rooted in his sense of the changing role of monasticism and the potential for the lesson of monastic *ascesis* to teach personal formation as a basis for political transformation.

Chapter two argues that Merton's conviction in the dignity of the human person motivated him to appropriate the pacifism of the Catholic New Left in England that opposed deterrence as deforming the moral integrity of the person. This chapter is orientated by the intellectual ground of radical pacifism that

Merton enfolded within his monastic *ascesis* to teach personal formation as a ground for authentic action in the world. This aligned with Merton's aspiration to support the embryonic Catholic peace movement.

Chapter three argues that Merton perceived himself as a truth-teller against the paradox of nuclear deterrence that pre-supposed, on the one hand, that nuclear war was simultaneously possible and impossible, and on the other hand that the system was poised for war, so that the threat was credible. Despite the fact that Merton was well-intentioned, he did exaggerate his pacifism as being a legitimate Catholic position while Trappist censors did not regard Merton as having a religious mandate to speak on the morality of nuclear weapons. This chapter is orientated by tensions between values and actions as Merton, as a parrhesiastes, negotiated the system of Trappist censorship to publication.

Chapter four argues that Merton's opinion that *threatening* to use nuclear weapons ought to carry the same moral stigma as actually *using* them went beyond accepted Roman Catholic teaching. A reputational risk for Merton as a cloistered monk was public episcopal criticism of his views in the American Catholic media as this had the potential to compromise the future of his writing commissions and his potential to publish. This chapter is orientated by Merton re-evaluating his engagement with radical pacifism during the *Cold War Letters* project as a consequence of his experience of Trappist censorship. Merton had to balance truth-telling through writing in the context of his vocational obedience.

Chapter five argues that Merton was aware that he did not know enough about secular politics to overcome the ambiguities of his convictions, but he reconsidered his writings as his witness for conscience, even when his actions violated the principles of obedience required by his religious superiors. This

chapter is orientated by tensions between Merton's sense of himself as a truth-teller or parrhesiastes, his risk-taking, and institutional constraints on his freedom as a writer. Merton's presentation of himself as a parrhesiastes through the *Cold War Letters* project contributed to the survival of his pacifist writings.

In summary, Merton's critique of nuclear deterrence articulated his condemnation of massive retaliation rather than revealing any awareness of minimum deterrence as a flexible response to the communist threat. Merton was not tempted to believe that American virtue was sufficiently developed that the nation could be trusted never to misuse nuclear weapons. Afterall, it had been the United States of America that had dropped the first atomic bombs over Japan in 1945. While this action had ended the Second World War it had ushered in the Cold War. Merton held the view that the Roman Catholic Church, as a faith-based institution and community, had a responsibility to protect life and future generations and so had a moral duty to act as a moral persuader in calling for world leaders to eliminate the threat of nuclear weapons from international politics. Merton, a would-be prophet, held the view that nuclear weapons were instruments of technological idolatry that violated the basic religious principle of the dignity of life. Prophecy, however, was a dangerous trade. It was pacifists outside the institutional religious structure who interpreted Merton as holding a prophetic integrity. Catholic activists responded to Merton's personalism and gave his pacifist writings an afterlife. Merton was aware of this potential as he contributed to the construction of himself as a would-be prophet of peace.

Chapter 1

Merton's Search for Relevance as a Catholic Writer (13 January – 23 October 1961)

In January 1961, Martha Kannapeli, reviewing Thomas Merton's *Disputed Questions*, drew attention to Merton's "new" monasticism. Kannapeli quoted Merton: "such [an eremitic] community could engage in a very fruitful dialogue with non-Catholic intellectuals, with oriental thinkers, with artists and philosophers, scientists and politicians [. . .] but on a very simple, radical and primitive level though in full cognizance of the problems of our time."[1] Merton, here, was avowing himself as a monk who was not separate from the world, but shared in its problems.[2] The publishers intended the book to "challenge many of the *idées reçues* of our own society, not least the idea that a Trappist monk has little to say that is relevant to the human condition today."[3] Kannapeli, although sympathetic, was not convinced. Merton's new social orientation had less to do with political events and more to do with his search for relevance.

This chapter argues that Merton's emergence as a social critic in 1961 had less to do with the politics of the fallout shelter scare and more to do with his

[1] Martha Kannapeli, "Review of *Disputed Questions* (Farrar, Straus, Cudahy, 1960)," *The Record* (Louisville), January 13, 1961, 12.
[2] Ibid.
[3] Thomas Merton, "The Pasternak Affair," in *Disputed Questions* (1960; repr., London: Hollis & Carter, 1961), 3-67.

personal search for relevance as a Catholic writer in Cold War America. This chapter is orientated by Merton's avowal of himself as a truth-teller that pre-dated the *Cold War Letters* project. Section one argues that Merton's advocacy for the frankness of the writer was conditioned by his monastic *ascesis* or monastic way of being. Section two argues that Merton's own sense of a need for conversion of life was manifested by his choice to speak frankly on the moral risk of nuclear weapons because this was a risk that Merton believed he shared with other human beings. His form of truth-telling expressed a techno-scientific pessimism that appealed to political pacifists. Merton's engagement with political pacifism was accidental rather than deliberate. His decision to enter public debate coincided with religious commentators wrestling with the morality of nuclear preparedness at a moment when the American family became a site of rhetorical politics through the fallout shelter scare. Section three argues that both Merton and a Catholic commentator, Fr. Laurence C. McHugh, S.J., considered themselves as being loyal Americans and faithful Catholics, but in different ways. McHugh's shelter ethics as self-defence at gunpoint attracted national disdain for discounting the better view Americans had of themselves as being good neighbours. What was at stake for Merton was a reduction of the potential of the human person for the purposes of calculation and utility within a techno-scientific system that nuclear preparedness evoked in his viewpoint.

In summary, personal conversion was the basis of Merton's pacifist writings. His ethical commitment to the dignity of human life reflected Thomistic "*dignitas*" to assert that human beings have dignity by virtue of what they can become not because of the simple fact that they are persons. Merton's techno-scientific pessimism caused him to dismiss Cold War anti-communist

rhetoric as robbing the communist enemy of his basic humanity that, in turn, had potential to deform the judgement of Americans. His truth-telling was rooted in his sense of the changing role of monasticism and the potential for the lesson of monastic *ascesis* to teach personal conversion as a basis for political transformation so that Americans could be their better selves. Fr. McHugh intended his shelter ethics to signal to mainstream Americans that there was no conflict between Catholics being faithful to their religion and loyal to the nation, but mainstream Americans rejected McHugh's shelter ethics as discounting their best view of themselves as citizens and neighbours. Nuclear preparedness was a cipher for Merton to speak frankly on personal conversion from his monastic perspective. His was a minority viewpoint, but it resonated with pacifists.

Merton's Monastic *Ascesis*

This section enfolds Merton's social turn in *Disputed Questions* as a mode of self-declaration that was conditioned by his monastic *ascesis* or way of being. Merton petitioned his superiors in 1960 for the specific purpose of winning a modicum of freedom from within his monastic community to correspond and meet with visitors beyond the cloister walls under the *aegis* of fostering ecumenical dialogue. This sanction was vital for allowing Merton to engage in activities during the year of the *Cold War Letters*.

Merton's attempt to transcend the religiosity of his writing had been identified by William Shannon in 1992 as being a motivating factor in Merton's secular turn in his writing after 1961.[4] This section locates this social turn in events that pre-date the *Cold War Letters* and that are pivotal for understanding

[4] William Shannon, *Silent Lamp: The Thomas Merton Story* (New York: Crossroad, 1992), 181-82.

the nature of Merton's engagement with nuclear pacifism during that project. Lawrence Cunningham in 1999 considered Merton's social orientation as his attempt to free himself from a monasticism that was penitential and otherworldly in its form and was not vocationally orientated by social action.[5] This chapter re-evaluates Merton's social turn as continuation, rather than a rupture, in his writing life. His focus was ongoing process of conversion of life and this is reflected in writing with a renewed frankness. Merton, in *The New Man*, attributes to the prophet Job in the Old Testament a frankness of speech through his remonstrations with God that is a character of "true *parrhesia*" by which the "inscrutable mystery of God speaks to us directly, challenging us with questions that do not have an answer."[6] Religiosity may provide the structures for ways of knowing, but the religious experience emerges through personal encounter with unknowable otherness. Merton, here, writes: "*Parrhesia* is the fully mature condition of one who has been questioned by God and has thereby become, in the fullest and most spiritual sense, a man."[7] Merton encountered the unknowable otherness of the Russian enemy as a fellow writer. Merton represented Boris Pasternak in *Disputed Questions* as his prototype of a modern parrhesiast who spoke frankly on the nature of human existence, on his own terms, rather than as a representative of an ideological system. Merton writes: "[Pasternak] is saying that political and social structures as we understand them are things of the past, and that the crisis through which we are now passing is nothing but the full and inescapable manifestation of their falsity."[8] Merton was privileging personal conversion over political conformity. Merton writes: "We

[5] Lawrence Cunningham, *Thomas Merton and the Monastic Vision* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1999), 89.
[6] Merton, *The New Man* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1961), 97.
[7] Ibid, 98.
[8] Merton, "The Pasternak Affair," in *Disputed Questions*, 67.

are in a cold war that is total in the sense that it exploits every available resource and one of the most explosive forces in this warfare is the psychology of the helpless civilian . . . The struggle for survival, freedom and truth is going to be won or lost in our thoughts, in our spirit."[9] Merton's perception of geopolitics was filtered through the prism of his monastic *ascesis*.

The point that Merton did stress through his pacifist writings was that the struggle to find authenticity was not unique to him as a monk. Rowan Williams in 2020 highlights Benedictine monastic *ascesis* as a lifelong process of conversion of life that required the monk to tease apart the illusions of self-fantasy that were ultimately self-serving. These were struggles that were not exclusive to the monk, but were struggles that the monk also shared with individuals in secular society.[10] Williams uses the example of Merton to illustrate his point as follows: "Read Thomas Merton's journals, and you can see how hard it is – how hard it was for him – to discern what was a matter of an authentic vocation to solitude and what was conditioned by reaction to just a regimented common life."[11] Williams captures the essence of Merton's continuous literary theme of personal conversion for political and social transformation throughout his career. Merton invited his readers to reflect upon the struggles in their lives through the contemporary topics he reflected upon in his writings. Despite the political appearance of Merton's pacifist writings the content remained rooted in his interest in the conversion of life, which was a theme in his earlier writings.

The constant theme in Merton's writings was his wrestling with the apparent contradiction of being a writer who engaged with the world, on the one

[9] Merton, "The Shelter Ethic," *The Catholic Worker* (New York), November 1, 1961, 5; *Passion for Peace*, ed. William Shannon (New York: Crossroad, 1995), 26.
[10] Rowan Williams, *The Way of St. Benedict* (London: Bloomsbury, 2020), 31.
[11] Ibid, 64.

hand, and his vocational life as a monk who was removed from the world and its affairs, on the other. Merton had voluntarily renounced his bohemian life in New York to join an austere religious community in rural Kentucky in 1941 in order to find God and he enthusiastically shared his journey with his readers. The young Merton had described the Abbey of Gethsemani in Kentucky as being "the center of America" whose monastic cycle of prayers seven times a day were "keeping the universe from cracking in pieces and falling apart."[12] Merton presents the monastery as a powerhouse of prayer being vital to the spiritual wellbeing of a nation that was barely aware of this abbey's existence.

Merton had joined a monastery to find God, but this vocation asked him to encounter himself through the structured support of a life of obedience. This meant that he voluntarily committed himself to a mode of veridiction or truth-telling that was orientated away from material existence towards transcendence. He agreed to be conducted or governed by a particular regime of truth within monastic *ascesis*. He had taken his name in religion as Mary Louis Merton, O.C.S.O. (Order of Cistercians of the Strict Observance). On taking final vows, a monk renounced his secular identity and was given a new name in religion that signified him as being set apart. Merton lived as a monk of Gethsemani Abbey near Bardstown in Nelson County, Kentucky, founded in 1848 by Trappists from the Abbey of Melleray in France.[13] The Trappist community of Gethsemani, where for twenty-seven years Merton lived, prayed and worked, knew him as Fr. Louis although he published under his secular name. Merton as a monk was vocationally committed to renouncing the secular world, but as a celebrity author he remained implicated in the world's activities by contributing through writing

[12] Merton, *A Secular Journal*. (London: The Catholic Book Club, 1959), 91.
[13] Jim Forest, *The Root of War is Fear: Thomas Merton's Advice to Peacemakers* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2016), 13.

to the economy of his religious community. This tension did have implications for how he asked questions of secular issues from a religious perspective.

American Catholic triumphalism facilitated Merton to become the author he had desired to be from his youth. He became a celebrity author at a time when Catholic religious communities across America were enjoying the expansion that Evelyn Waugh, also a convert to Catholicism, eulogised as being the blossoming of American Catholicism's spirit after World War II.[14] Catholic publishers marketed Merton as the archetype of an American Catholic writer who was urbane, but who had chosen to heroically renounce the world to find life's meaning in the cloister.[15] The problem for Merton in 1961 was that he perceived that his religious avowal was to the religious institution rather than to the religious experience. In order to think differently he needed to disavow the religiosity of his former spiritual writings in order to avow a deeper authenticity. An example of this process is seen in Merton's journal entry on 11 March 1961 that shows him involved in the confessional practice of self-discernment to sift out his motivations, as follows:

> I am still a 14th-century man: the century of Eckhart, Ruysbroeck, Tauler, the English recluses, the author of The Cloud, Langland, and Chaucer – more an independent and a hermit than a community man, by no means an ascetic, interested in psychology, a lover of the dark cloud in which God is found by love. This is what I am: I cannot consent to be it and not be ashamed that I am not something more fashionable.[16]

This extract reveals the confessional tone of Merton's Catholicity as a mode of veridiction or truth-telling through the conversion of life that was central to the

[14] Evelyn Waugh, "The American Epoch in the Catholic Church," *Life*, September 19, 1949, 134-55; Mary Frances Coady, *Merton & Waugh* (Brewster, MA: Paraclete Press, 2015), 99.

[15] Patricia Burton, "Mass-Market Monk: Thomas Merton in the Paperback Revolution. Part I: New American Library" *The Merton Seasonal* 39, no. 3 (Fall 2014): 3-13; Burton, "Mass-Market Monk: Thomas Merton in the Paperback Revolution – Part II" *The Merton Seasonal* 39, no. 4 (Winter 2014): 22-32.

[16] Merton, *Turning Toward the World* (March 11, 1961), ed. Victor Kramer (San Francisco CA: Harper Collins, 1997), 99.

monastic vocation. His Catholicity was removed from the American Catholic experience. This is illustrated by his choice of mystical writers as demonstrating his commitment to apophatic theology, also known as negative theology, which approaches the experience of God beyond ordinary perception. Next, Merton espouses Christian *agape* as an expression of love of God and love of neighbour which grounded his monastic *ascesis*.[17] His phrase, "in which God is found by love," indicates how Merton perceived self-avowal as being motivated by "love" as *agape* that required recognition of the common humanity of all persons, including enemies, because of the dignity of personhood, in a Christian view.[18] Merton's confessional process was supported by his superior because it was the duty of the abbot to care for the salvation of the monk as well as seeking out the best in each monk for the benefit and flourishing of the monastic community.

Merton was seeking new ways to make his literary theme of conversion of life relevant to a new American readership.[19] Merton's co-editing of *A Thomas Merton Reader*, with Thomas P. McDonnell during 1961, gave Merton an opportunity to disavow the folly of his youthful enthusiasm for the religiosity of the cloistered life, as follows: "It is possible to doubt whether I have become a monk (a doubt I have to live with), but it is not possible to doubt that I am a writer, that I was born one and will most probably die as one. Disconcerting, disedifying as it is, this seems to be my lot and my vocation."[20] Here, Merton was being confessional and autoreferential. His writing was a form of *ascesis* seeking to negotiate the ambiguities between a monk renouncing the

[17] On love of God and love of neighbour, Deut. 6:5; Lev. 19:18 (Douay-Rheims).
[18] Timothy Jackson, *Political Agape: Christian Love and Liberal Democracy* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2015).
[19] Roger Lipsey, *Make Peace before the Sun Goes Down: The Long Encounter of Thomas Merton and His Abbott, James Fox.* (Boston & London: Shanbhala, 2015).
[20] Merton, "First and Last Thoughts: An Author's Preface," in *A Thomas Merton Reader*, ed. Thomas McDonnell, (1962; rev. ed., London: Lamp Press, 1974), 17.

world, which was monasticism's dominant truth, and as a writer seeking to engage with the world in a new way, which was Merton's dissident truth.

The monastic life Merton had known for twenty years was also changing and he was wrestling with the implications of this change for his sense of what it meant to be a monk in modern America. Merton's superior, Dom James Fox, initiated "Gethsemani Farms" to allow the community to pay its way, but Merton feared that this change falsified the monastic call to a radically different lifestyle.[21] Dom James, Abbot of Gethsemani Abbey, inherited the financial burdens of a period of expansion during World War II under Dom Frederic Dunne, Gethsemani's first American-born Abbot.[22] American Trappists had peaked at over 1,000 monks and nuns in 1956 many were drawn to the cloistered life inspired by Merton's spiritual writings.[23] Dom James, educated in business at Harvard University, was an able administrator who maintained an open door policy in accepting novices, which necessitated making Gethsemani Abbey financially viable.[24] The difference of opinion between Merton and his superior was based on their different perceptions of regimes of truth or what constituted the authentic monastic way of being. The problem of monasticism's relevance in the modern world was the common ground for their shared concerns.

Merton's reflection on the ethos of personal conversion as a necessary prerequisite for authentic political action was forged through his re-telling in *Disputed Questions* of his brief correspondence with Russian writer Boris Pasternak from 1958 to 1960 as a metaphor of the writer as truth-teller

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[21] Rowan Williams, "'The Only Real City': Monasticism and the Social Vision," in *A Silent Action: Engagements with Thomas Merton* (Louisville KY: Fons Vitae, 2011), 55-68.
[22] Raymond Flanagan, *Burnt Out Incense* (Dublin: Clonmore & Reynolds Ltd., 1950), 270-300.
[23] James Hennesey, *American Catholics: A History of the Roman Catholic Community in the United States* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1981), 287.
[24] Cunningham, *Thomas Merton and the Monastic Vision*, 35.

attempting to transcend Cold War binaries.[25] Merton wrote: "[Pasternak] became a kind of 'sign' of that honesty, integrity, sincerity which we tend to associate with the free and creative personality."[26] Merton was making the salient point that Americans were not uniquely virtuous. The context was that Pasternak had won the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1958 for his novel *Doctor Zhivago*, but political pressures prevented him attending the award ceremony in Stockholm. Pasternak made it clear in his novel that he chose to have no part in politics and wished to merely remain as a human being. This was Pasternak's unpardonable offence, which led to his eventual official disgrace. Soviet authorities interpreted Zhivago as the negation of the Soviet "positive hero" and also of the *homo politicus* that was expected of every Russian.[27] Merton wrote: "The deep interest of *Dr. Zhivago* is precisely its diagnosis of man's spiritual situation. . . Hope of attaining true freedom by purely political means has become an insane delusion."[28] Merton, here, read politics against his sense of moral passivity at the heart of contemporary American society, which was the central theme in *Disputed Questions*. Political events and sentiments appear in *Doctor Zhivago* as mere aberrations or barbaric atavisms. [29] It is precisely this absence of the political life that makes *Doctor Zhivago* such a deeply political novel. By leaving the unspeakable unspoken, Pasternak confirmed his lifelong assertion that the

[25] Merton, "The Pasternak Affair II: The People with Watch-Chains," ["Boris Pasternak and the People with Watch Chains"] *Jubilee* (July 1959): 277-82; *Selected Essays*, ed. Patrick F. O'Connell (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2013), 39-51.
[26] Merton, "The Pasternak Affair," in *Disputed Questions*, 5.
[27] Anna Diegel, "Human Rights and Literature: Solzhenitsyn and Pasternak," *Theoria* 75 (May 1990): 82-83.
[28] Merton, "The Pasternack Affair," in *Disputed Questions*, 47.
[29] Boris Pasternak, *Doctor Zhivago*, trans. Max Hayward and Manya Harari (London: Collins and Harvill Press, 1958).

significance of human life ultimately lay outside of the historical problems of his time and that it was the right of the individual to choose his own values.[30]

Pasternak as a writer of parrhesiastic frankness represented for Merton a sign of contradiction and of hope in the potential for a new humanism as set apart from Cold War political ideologies that mirrored one another. Merton wrote: "I might as well admit that, looking at the divisions of the modern world, I find it hard to avoid seeing somewhat the same hypocrisies, the same betrayals of man, the same denials of God, the same evils in different degrees and under different forms" also at the heart of American materialist culture.[31] Merton concluded: "I cannot find it in myself to put on a mentality that spells war."[32] This has echoes of Jacques Maritain's argument that in a civilisation "where the Christian sap had itself grown weak," then, even in its Christian elements, it comes to accept and to become totally absorbed "in the blind movement of a social materialism."[33] For Maritain, the aim of the Christian in the world was to develop the potential of the whole human person.[34] This constituted the humanism of Catholic personalism.

Pasternak's way of being as a writer reminded Merton that Americans were not uniquely virtuous. Merton defended Pasternak by letter to Aleksei Surkov, the head of the Soviet Writers' Union. Merton initiated correspondence with Pasternak through an intermediary contact, John Harris, an English school teacher and a recipient of the *Cold War Letters*, who covertly got messages to Pasternak without attracting the attention of Soviet authorities.[35] Merton

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[30] Peter Finn and Petra Couvée, *The Zhivago Affair: The Kremlin, the CIA and the Battle Over a Forbidden Book* (London: Vintage, 2015), 199.
[31] Merton, "The Pasternak Affair," in *Disputed Questions*, 6.
[32] Ibid.
[33] Jacques Maritain, *True Humanism* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1938), 106-07.
[34] Gabriel Flynn, "A Renaissance in Twentieth-Century French 'Catholic Philosophy,'" *Revista Portuguesa de Filosofia* 76, no. 4 (2020): 1576.
[35] John Harris, letter to Merton 1958-1960. Section A: Correspondence, Thomas Merton Center, Bellarmine University, Louisville, KY afterwards TMC; Merton, letter to John Harris, June 8,

protested against Pasternak's censure in a letter on 29 October 1958 to Surkov who had expelled Pasternak from his livelihood. Merton defended Pasternak's freedom of speech to Surkov by arguing that Pasternak had only followed what Premier Nikita Khrushchev had done by denouncing Stalinism as a Cult of Personality at the 20th Soviet Communist Party Congress in February 1956.[36] Merton wrote with parrhesiastic frankness to Surkov, as follows:

> If your government is strong and prosperous, what does it have to fear from anything said by Pasternak about the early days of the Revolution? If you silence him it will only be interpreted as a sign of insecurity and weakness. In 1956, the whole world hoped that at last freedom and prosperity would come to reward the long hard years of bitter sacrifice made by the supremely generous Russian nation under Stalin. *Dr Zhivago* was written with nothing else but this hope in mind.[37]

Merton evaluated the Pasternak of *Doctor Zhivago* ("Doctor Life") not as a political writer in any narrow sense. What was significant for Merton was that Pasternak refused to reduce the richness of life to the confines of ideology.[38]

Truth-telling, as a mode of personal authenticity, does not necessarily imply truthfulness through the accuracy of information being communicated. Merton did not know, and could not have known, that Premier Khrushchev, to mark a clear break with the Stalinist era, was engaging in a covert anti-religious campaign as he returned to the importance of "scientific atheism" in the construction of a communist future.[39] The anti-religious campaign initiated by Khrushchev from 1958 to 1964 attempted to revive the revolutionary spirit, targeting the backwardness of the peasantry in a concerted push to bring progress

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1962. Section A: Correspondence, TMC, typed and mimeographed as Merton, "Cold War Letter # 83, to John Harris" (June 8, 1962), *Cold War Letters*, eds. Bochen and Shannon, 149-50.

[36] Merton, letter to Aleksei Surkov, October 29, 1958. Section A: Correspondence, TMC; Finn and Couvée, *The Zhivago* Affair, 88-89.

[37] Merton, "Letter to Aleksei Surkov" (October 29, 1958), in *A Life in Letters*, eds. William H. Shannon and Christine M. Bochen (Oxford: Lion Hudson, 2009), 113.

[38] Merton, "Boris Pasternak and the People with Watch Chains," in *Selected Essays*, ed. O'Connell, 51.

[39] James Kapaló, "Performing Clandestinity: The Religious Underground, the Secret Police and the Media in Communist Eastern Europe," *Journal of the British Association for the Study of Religion* 22 (2020): 32-38.

and modernity to all segments of Soviet society. What was significant for Merton was that Pasternak testified to the primacy of life and freedom, as personal authenticity, over systems of either state collectivism or free-market materialism.

Dom James mentioned through correspondence to Fr. Paul Bourne that "Father Louis composed a letter to the Secretary of the Soviet Writers' Union in Moscow—Surkov. The Abbot General cabled his permission to do this and to have it published if he wanted to."[40] Merton did not receive a reply from Surkov. Merton's letter to Surkov was intercepted by the Central Intelligence Agency because its envelope was addressed in Russian, but it was forwarded to its intended recipient in Moscow without interruption because it did not pose any ideological threat from an official American perspective.[41] Merton, here, was an unwitting accomplice in espousing American freedom against totalitarianism.[42]

The significance of Merton's letter to Surkov in defence of Pasternak was a catalyst for Merton to lobby his religious superiors for permission to begin a series of ecumenical retreat seminars at his abbey where he could probe modern moral subjects that he planned to integrate into his Benedictine *ascesis* through writing. Merton's search for interactions beyond the cloister motivated him to write to Pope John XXIII on 10 November 1958, in his capacity as novice master of Gethsemani Abbey in Kentucky, offering the congratulations of his novices upon the pontiff's recent election as successor to Pope Pius XII. In his letter, Merton set out his social apostolate expressed as Catholicism in dialogue with secularism. Merton confided in his seminal letter to the new pontiff in 1958 that he had begun to engage in a letter correspondence with "a circle of intellectuals from other parts of the world" forming a correspondence network that he called

[40] Dom James Fox letter to Fr. Paul Bourne, March 9, 1959 Section A: Correspondence, TMC.
[41] Merton, letter to Aleksei Surkov, October 29, 1958. Section A: Correspondence, TMC.
[42] Kannapeli, "Review of *Disputed Questions*," 12.

his "apostolate of friendship."[43] This phrase encapsulates the essence of Merton's sense of community as rooted in Benedictine monastic hospitality.[44]

Merton's ecumenical project made sense to him as his authentic response to Msgr. John Tracy Ellis, S.J., who raised a concern on the place of American Catholics in intellectual life.[45] Ellis proposed that American Catholics had been defensive about their faith and so concerned about the issues of caring for a largely immigrant church that they had neglected the intellectual life. That neglect resulted in an under-representation of American Roman Catholics in public life, in the scholarly world, and in the world of intellectuals.[46] The significance of Merton's conviviality as an "apostolate of friendship" was that it acknowledged friendship as a freely chosen relationship that exists outside juridical power structures and offers the potential for a new mode of social relationships and subjectivity beyond juridical power. An issue for Abbot General, Dom Gabriel Sortais, was Merton's independence of spirit that demonstrated to him Merton's lingering obstinacy to conform to monastic obedience. This has been examined by Roger Lipsey in 2015 who highlighted the value of Dom James for Merton in acting as an institutional buffer against the more conservative forces within the Trappists.[47] Merton's lingering obstinacy to conform to monastic obedience would remain the unresolved issue that festered during the *Cold War Letters* project.

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[43] Merton, "Letter to Pope John XXIII" (November 10, 1958), in *The Hidden Ground of Love: The Letters of Thomas Merton on Religious Experience and Social Concerns*, ed. William H. Shannon (New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 1985), 481-83.

[44] Merton, *What are These Wounds? The Life of A Cistercian Mystic, Saint Lutgarde of Aywières* (Dublin: Clonmore and Reynolds Ltd., 1948), 121.

[45] John Tracy Ellis, "American Catholics and the intellectual life," *Thought* 30 (Autumn 1955): 351-88.

[46] Cunningham, *Thomas Merton and the Monastic Vision*, 64-65.

[47] Lipsey, *Make Peace before the Sun Goes Down*, 156-57.

The performance of monastic obedience was conditioned by the free will of the monk who voluntarily consented to be governed by his abbot. Dom James permitted Merton "to start, very discreetly, a small retreat project" aimed at Protestant and Catholic ecumenical dialogue with, "theologians and heads of *Protestant* seminaries, another meeting of professors of a Catholic university (priests and lay people together), another of psychiatrists and writers, and possibly of artists, poets, etc."[48] Merton's journal highlights that he used these as study seminars in which he was learning how he might imaginatively place the resources of Benedictine monastic *ascesis* at the service of secular society. The Catholic university Merton mentioned in his journal referred to Bellarmine in Louisville that became the site of Merton's archive after 1963.[49] Trappist monks had been expected to be professional world deniers.[50] Merton did receive latitude under obedience to correspond and meet visitors beyond the cloister walls that was a trackway that he prepared by his letter to Pope John XXIII. If Merton had not achieved this privilege from his superiors then it would have been more difficult for him to have engaged with political pacifism.

The ecumenical dialogues Merton was discreetly initiating in Kentucky could not have occurred at a more appropriate time during the planning stage of the Second Vatican Council as it aligned with its aspirations and allowed Merton, from the margins of ecclesiastical power, to correspond personally with the pontiff.[51] In late April 1960, Dom James, received a letter from Cardinal Domenico Tardini, Vatican Secretary of State, who communicated the particular

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[48] Merton, "Letter to Pope John XXIII" (February 11, 1960), in *The Hidden Ground of Love*, ed. Shannon, 484.
[49] Merton, *A Search for Solitude* (April 29, 1960), ed. Lawrence Cunningham (San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1997), 386.
[50] Monica Furlong, *Merton, A Biography* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1985), 253.
[51] Forest, *Living with Wisdom*, 129.

interest Pope John XXIII had in Merton's "special retreats."[52] Tardini, who was president of the ante-preparatory commission appointed by John XXIII to begin preparations for the Second Vatican Council, which had been announced in 1959, was responsible for inviting the bishops of the world to submit suggestions for an agenda for the Council. Support from Pope John XXIII for Merton's covert ecumenical dialogues had reached Gethsemani Abbey in Kentucky on 11 April 1960 with the arrival of Lorenzo Barbato, a Venetian architect, who was the pontiff's friend. As a symbol of fraternity, the pope sent Merton his liturgical stole that he had worn during his papal coronation on 28 October 1958. Merton kept it on display in his novitiate.[53] In return, Merton sent the pontiff, in Barbato's care, a special edition of his latest book, *The Wisdom of the Desert*, a collection of sayings of the Desert Fathers, wilderness hermits from early Christianity. Merton had written about the significance of the Desert Fathers as being hermits engaged with the "problems of their time" that he aligned with Catholic personalism of his own time.[54] Merton situated his actions within the *longue durée* of Catholicism. The aphorisms of the Desert Fathers concerned how their wisdom was a mode of parrhesiastic frankness uttering another way of being in the world. Merton's anthology was a thinly veiled comment on the duty of Catholicism to engage with secularism in new and creative ways of dialogue.

Merton's impetus to contribute to ecumenical dialogue at the grassroots through monastic retreats in rural Kentucky existed in an atmosphere of new directions in Catholic social teaching, initiated by Pope John XXIII, that

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[52] Merton, *A Search for Solitude* (April 24, 1960) ed. Cunningham, 385.

[53] The coronation stole Pope John XXIII gave to Merton as a personal gift is on display in the Thomas Merton Center, Bellarmine University in Louisville, KY; Jim Forest, *Living with Wisdom: A Life of Thomas Merton*. (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1991), 128.

[54] Merton, "Letter to Pope John XXIII" (April 11, 1960), in *The Hidden Ground of Love*, ed. Shannon, 485; Merton, *The Wisdom of the Desert*. (New York: New Directions, 1960), 4.

attempted to navigate between the *Scylla* of oppressive capitalism and the *Charybdis* of statist, atheist socialism.[55] This was announced in 1961 by *Mater et Magistra* ("Christianity and Social Progress"), which was Pope John XXIII's first social encyclical that celebrated the modern world's progress in social reform, economic development, education, and human rights.[56] This encyclical concentrated on the growing interdependence of the world's peoples. As a teaching document for Roman Catholics, the encyclical highlighted contradictions of the era: investment of precious scientific, technological, and financial resources into weapons of mass destruction to the detriment of the dignity of the person and the flourishing of the common good. Merton, in his response to *Mater et Magistra*, wrote: "The Christian cannot separate his life of faith from the real world of work and struggle in which he lives. His life in Christ will inevitably be effected by his attitude toward such problems as nuclear war, the race question, the growth of new nations, and the whole crucial struggle between the communist and noncommunist worlds."[57] Merton argued that it was never sufficient for American Catholics to lead a "Christian life" that "is confined, in practice, to the pews of the parish Church and to a few prayers in the home, without regard for these acute problems which affect millions of human beings and which call into question not only the future of man's civilization but even perhaps the very survival of the human race itself."[58] In conclusion, Merton wrote: "We are all implicated in these tremendous problems, and we are obliged not only by our vocation as Christians but even by our human nature itself to

[55] Peter Huff, "Saint Peter Sheathes His Sword: The Modern Papacy's Turn Toward Pacifism," *International Journal on World Peace* 25, no.1 (March 2008): 27-42.
[56] David O'Brien and Thomas Shannon, eds. *Catholic Social Thought: The Documentary Heritage*. (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1998), 82.
[57] Merton, *Life and Holiness* (1963; repr., New York: Image, 2014), 93.
[58] Ibid.

cooperate in the great effort to solve them with equity and efficiency."[59] Merton advocated *Mater et Magistra* as an encyclical that advised Catholics to promote justice in the world rather than conform to religious dogma.

Mater et Magistra was initially lauded by U.S. media.[60] The encyclical advocated that economics could be orientated towards justice by seeking out the best ways to order human affairs to insure an equitable distribution of wealth and to offer social protection to the vulnerable.[61] However, the encyclical highlighted economic inequalities in the Third World, which grated with the sensibilities of free enterprise enthusiasts who dismissed its message as being sympathetic to communism.[62] The encyclical expanded Pope Leo XIII's idea of rights to livelihood, but extended it so far beyond what any pope had said before that it seemed to many Americans to be socialistic and revolutionary.[63] American Catholics were amongst the pope's staunchest opponents because the progressive aspirations of Catholic communitarian personalism clashed with their economic interests and highlighted how Catholics had become acculturated into American secular values. William F. Buckley Jr. and fellow New Conservatives, many of whom included Catholic converts, engaged in pernicious debate with liberal Catholics who wrote for *America* and *Commonweal* over *Mater et Magistra* in 1961.[64] Although Buckley, an urbane and charismatic gadfly, could not resist making wounding jibes against Catholic liberals, like them, he continued to see the Catholic people of the world, and those of America as sharing a common fate

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[59] Ibid, 94.
[60] Editors, "U.S. Lauds Encyclical," *The Record* (Louisville), July 12, 1961, 1
[61] Karen Armstrong, *Fields of Blood: Religion and the History of Violence* (London: Bodley Head, 2014), 300.
[62] John XXIII "Mater et Magistra: Christianity and Social Progress," in *Catholic Social Thought*, eds. Brien and Shannon, 82-127; Pierre Vallin, "Bien lire 'Mater et Magistra,'" *Témoignage Chrétien*, July 21, 1961, 8-9.
[63] Thomas O'Dea, "The Role of the Intellectual in the Catholic Tradition," *Daedalus* 101, no.2 (Spring 1972): 179.
[64] Editors, "State of the Question," *America* (New York), February 11, 1961, 634-36.

against the threat of international communism.[65] Buckley chose to ignore nuances of Catholic social teaching that critiqued economic liberalism from a communitarian personalist perspective.[66] Buckley's off-handed dissent against *Mater et Magistra* marked a dividing line between the conservatism that Buckley was keen to engender and a Catholicism that would develop in response to the leftward drift of American Catholics in the wake of Vatican II.[67] The silence of *Mater et Magistra* on ideology demonstrated that Pope John XXIII was determined not to allow Catholic social teaching to be deployed in Cold War rhetorical polemic. Catholicism was seeking to reclaim its relevance by highlighting the need to promote social justice in the international order.[68]

In summary, Merton was tapping into shifts within Roman Catholicism. He aligned himself with a new style of social engagement as espoused by Pope John XXIII who chose to soften rhetorical condemnation of communism. This softening of language was unrepresentative of mainstream Catholic America. Merton's social turn was conditioned by his evolving subjectivity within his vocational life. It was for this reason that he rejected the religiosity of his former writings in order to engage in a new way with the secular world through writing. This avowal required him to disavow himself as a writer of religiosity. It is for this reason that he wrote of himself as being a "guilty bystander" who was guilty through the privilege of being a U.S. citizen who espoused freedom, but who was

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[65] For William Buckley's debate with William Clancy, "The Catholic in the Modern World," *Commonweal* (New York), December 16, 1960; Patrick Allitt, "American Catholics and the New Conservatism of the 1950s," *U.S. Catholic Historian* 7, no.1 (Winter 1988): 24.

[66] Francis Wilson, "Liberals, Conservatives, and Catholics," *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science,* 344 (November 1962): 85-94.

[67] Deal Hudson, *Onward, Christian Soldiers: The Growing Political Power of Catholics and Evangelicals in the United States* (New York: Threshold Editions, 2008), 131.

[68] Armstrong, *Fields of Blood*, 300.

morally in peril from his self-delusion that his separateness as a monk exempted him from the concerns of fellow Americans.[69]

Fear Thy Neighbour

This section argues that Merton's sense of personal authenticity in his rejection of the religiosity of pious writing in favour of the modern moral subject of a commitment to the dignity of human life provoked him to make small-scale alliances with radical pacifists in the Catholic Worker movement who both shaped and reinforced his negative perception of Cold War America as being committed to nuclear weapons for security, which further reinforced his techno-scientific pessimism. His personalism held symbolic value for radical pacifists seeking the moral high ground in their opposition to resumption of atmospheric testing by the U.S. government.

Broadly speaking, scholarship has presented Merton's *Cold War Letters* project as a stand-off between Merton and his superiors engaged in a rhetorical "cold war" regarding the role of monasticism in Cold War America. Lawrence Cunningham in 1999 explained that Merton transformed political events into metaphors to describe "Merton's own guerrilla skirmishes against what he saw as an unfair use of religious authority to silence him."[70] In Cunningham's view, this pseudo-conflict was "cold" because it had not broken out in acts of open defiance of religious authority. Cunningham concludes that Merton was "an obedient (if

[69] Merton, *Conjectures of a Guilty Bystander* (1966; repr., New York: Image, 1989), Merton initiated this project in 1961 and the events of the year of the *Cold War Letters* are edited for publication. James Cronin, "'No Such Thing as Innocent By-standing': The Bystander Motif in the Social Writings of Thomas Merton," *Merton Journal* 21, no. 2 (Advent 2014): 72-84.
[70] Cunningham, *Thomas Merton and the Monastic Vision*, 89.

crafty) monk."[71] Here, Cunningham faithfully adopted Merton's account of himself as being engaged in an ongoing struggle to find personal authenticity that circulated around differences between himself and monastic authorities regarding how monasticism should engage with the modern world.[72] The remaining sections of this chapter will argue that Merton's response to the fallout shelter debate was a mode of veridiction or truth-telling within the ecclesiastical system: monastic authorities valued the monk as being removed from secular affairs, whereas Merton considered the monk as sharing in the human affairs of the world. In essence, monks faced similar nuclear risks as every living creature.

Merton's initial engagement with nuclear pacifism happened to coincide at a moment when the American family became a site of rhetorical politics through the fallout shelter debate. The fallout shelter scare was the unintended consequence on the American home front of President John F. Kennedy's foreign policy to project U.S. resolve against Soviet incursions in the city of Berlin, deep inside the Soviet sector, during 1961.[73] Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev was threatening to negotiate a separate peace with East Germany, and to declare Berlin a "neutral" city from which the Western Allies would have to withdraw by the end of 1961. Khrushchev's stand on Berlin was motivated by the huge numbers of East Germans who were fleeing the German Democratic

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[71] Ibid.

[72] How monasticism should authentically engage with the modern world is a leitmotif threading correspondence from Merton to Daniel Berrigan, S.J., November 10, 1961-June 15, 1962, Section A: Correspondence, TMC; Merton to Dorothy Day, April 22, 1959 - June 16, 1962, Section A: Correspondence, TMC; Merton to Msgr. John Tracy Ellis, December 7, 1961- March 19, 1962, Section A: Correspondence, TMC; Merton to John Cuthbert Ford, S.J., December 18, 1961 - January 1962, Section A: Correspondence, TMC; Merton to James Forest, July 31 1961 - January 17, 1963, Section A: Correspondence, TMC; Merton to Erich Fromm, November 3, 1960 - February 26, 1962, Section A: Correspondence, TMC; Merton to Czesław Miłosz, September 16, 1961 - March 21, 1962, Section A: Correspondence, TMC; Merton to Gordon Zahn, November 27, 1961 - May 24 1962, Section A: Correspondence, TMC.

[73] Kevin Dean, "'We Seek Peace, But We Shall Not Surrender': JFK's Use of Juxtaposition for Rhetorical Success in the Berlin Crisis," *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 21, no. 3 (Summer 1991): 531-44.

Republic for the West, mostly through the open city of Berlin. Between 1949 and 1961 a total of 2.8 million, one-sixth of the population, crossed into the West.[74] Berlin was a lightning rod for East-West tensions during the Cold War. It tested American resolve as to whether the nation would risk war defending the city deep inside the Soviet sector.[75] Any connection between fallout shelters and nuclear strategy was a tenuous one, but its political purpose contributed to the atmosphere of national consensus-building on the American home front against Soviet threats abroad.

Survival narratives encapsulated sensibilities that stemmed from a received imaginary: personal responsibility for survival, the character of the American people to exorcise fear, and an optimism that the American way of life would survive under any circumstances.[76] Civilian defence, however, bore merely a symbolic, rather than an intrinsic, relationship to strategy.[77] During the Republican administration of President Dwight D. Eisenhower, the gospel of self-help had satisfied both popular concerns over military control by federal agencies and conservative hostility regarding the notion that a massive federal investment in civil defence and new housing developments paved the way toward an expensive militarised New Deal.[78] The doctrine of self-help spilled into John F. Kennedy's administration in 1961, but Kennedy was the only enthusiastic civil defence advocate to occupy the White House. President Kennedy considered fallout shelters as symbolic of the pioneering spirit rather

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[74] Jeremy Isaacs and Taylor Downing, *Cold War. An Illustrated History, 1945-1991* (Boston, MA: Little, Brown, 1998), 172 & 170.

[75] Fredrick Kempe, *Berlin, 1961: Kennedy, Khrushchev and the Most Dangerous Place on Earth* (London: Penguin, 2012).

[76] Guy Oakes, *The Imaginary War: Civil Defense and American Cold War Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 131-32.

[77] Edward Geist, *Armageddon Insurance: Civil Defense in the United States and Soviet Union, 1945–1991* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2019), 150.

[78] Thomas Bishop, "'The Struggle to Sell Survival': Family Fallout Shelters and the Limits of Consumer Citizenship," *Modern American History* 2, no. 2 (2019): 135.

than adding to the nation's deterrence posture. This contradicted the views of commentators like Herman Kahn, but also of Defense Secretary McNamara, who believed that shelters would increase the credibility of the nuclear deterrent.[79]

The opening of the fallout shelter scare, as a survival narrative, began with a media report that sparked a national debate on the legitimacy of nuclear preparedness for survival in the event of a Soviet strike on the American homeland. On 18 August 1961, *Time* magazine's editorial, "Gun Thy Neighbor," ignited survival paranoia.[80] The editorial seeded rumour and misinformation by reporting that the head of Civil Defense in Las Vegas, J. Carlton Adair, was anticipating an invasion of Nevada after a nuclear attack, by a tattered horde of Los Angeles residents, "like a swarm of locusts." Adair advocated the establishment of a 5,000-person militia to protect Las Vegas against such an eventuality.[81] The editorial quoted Keith Dwyer, California's Riverside County Coordinator of Civil Defense, who had informed a group of officials and reserve policemen in the town of Beaumont that as many as 150,000 refugees from Los Angeles might stream into the town if there were a nuclear attack, and that all survival kits should include a pistol. The editorial reported that there was "nothing in the Christian ethic which denies one's right to protect oneself and one's family."[82] It was this reported statement that briefly ignited a national survival debate in which citizens and clergy tussled over the legitimacy for building home shelters.

President John F. Kennedy, initially, supported do-it-yourself shelters as offering a symbolic means of boosting national morale. However, the issue that

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[79] Geist, *Armageddon Insurance*, 158.
[80] Charles Davis, "Gun Thy Neighbor," *Time* (New York), August 18, 1961, 60.
[81] Kenneth Rose *One Nation Underground: The Fallout Shelter in American Culture* (New York and London: New York University Press, 2001), 98 & 258, n.85.
[82] Ibid

would fuel the national debate and weaken the forging of a national consensus was hesitant and weak government messaging as to how Americans could practically resource themselves to guarantee survival. Over the coming months, citizens scrambled for accurate information on how individuals could protect themselves and their families against imaginings of surprise Soviet attack. The *Time-Life-Fortune* media consortium endorsed President Kennedy's do-it-yourself home shelter campaign.[83] The fallout shelter debate erupted as a media event at a moment in the Cold War when the atmosphere of nuclear preparedness became rhetorically associated with the survival of the nation in the public consciousness.[84]

It was because the issue of nuclear survival intersected with family and community values that religious commentators became embroiled in the national conversation on the legitimacy of survival in the event of a Soviet nuclear strike on the American homeland. Mainstream religious commentators rejected the privatisation of survival and advocated for community shelters because they believed that it was the duty of the state to provide for the safety of all its citizens. The *Christian Century* commented in an editorial: "men and women who manage to survive a nuclear attack by locking doors on imperiled neighbors or shooting them down to save themselves might conceivably survive. But who would want to live in the kind of social order such people would create out of the shambles?"[85] The question for religious commentators was whether there would be a civilization worth saving and the best way to insure this was possible was

[83] "Kennedy's message on fallout shelters," *Life* (New York), September 15, 1961; Rose *One Nation Underground*, 84; Geist, *Armageddon Insurance*, 162.
[84] Raymond Bosler, "Can we Defend Ourselves," *The Criterion* (Indianapolis), July 28, 1961, 1.
[85] "Incivility in Civil Defense," *Christian Century*, August 23, 1961, 995; "Civil Defense: Survival (Contd.)," *Time*, November 3, 1961, 19; Rose, *One Nation Underground*, 257, n.72.

through government provision of community bomb shelters both at federal and state levels.

Radical pacifists were relegated to the margins of public debate and could only take part in symbolic gestures with the hope of momentarily capturing public attention as regards the existential threat of nuclear weapons. For the radical pacifist, Dorothy Day of the Catholic Worker movement, the intrinsic hostility of nuclear deterrence was conditioned by the wrongness of intention as being incompatible with the fifth commandment of the Decalogue, "Thou shalt not kill."[86] Day protested the shelter drills of "Operation Alert" (1954-61). In New York when American citizens hurried to fallout shelters Day refused to participate and instead she led her co-Catholic Workers to benches in Central Park. Her public dissent between 1955 and 1960 led, several times, to arrest for what Day called her "annual little war games."[87] Day's anti-nuclear protest was neither sanctioned nor supported by the American hierarchy that maintained the Roman Catholic qualified acceptance of deterrence.[88] Despite this, however, it is important to remember that the Roman Catholic Church never considered nuclear deterrence as being an end in itself, but as marking a stage towards eventual nuclear disarmament at an unspecified time in the future. This was the issue at stake for pacifists like Day who worked to raise public consciousness of nuclear preparedness as risking war because deterrence presumed intrinsic hostility. Any link between shelters and strategy was tenuous at best, but Day

[86] Ex. 20:13 (Douay-Rheims); Dorothy Day, "We Go on Record: the CW Response to Hiroshima," *The Catholic Worker* (New York), September 1, 1945, 1; Patricia McNeal, *Harder than War: Catholic Peacemaking in Twentieth-Century America* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1992), 67-68.
[87] Mark Massa, *Catholics and American Culture: Fulton Sheen, Dorothy Day, and the Notre Dame Football Team* (New York: Crossroad, 1999), 121.
[88] Ibid, 120-21.

regarded the shelters as being a physical manifestation of a ubiquitous militarism within American life that she was opposing through her witness to pacifism.

Dorothy Day valued Merton as a living embodiment of the potential of monastic *ascesis* as offering new ways of being.[89] Merton, in turn, was inspired by the Catholic Worker movement as a community keeping alive monastic *ascesis* through its communities of hospitality.[90] Merton had first written to praise Day's pacifist protest as being a "witness for peace" following her arrest in City Hall Park, New York, for refusing to take shelter during air raid drills in 1959.[91] Merton wrote to Day: "You are very right in going at it along the lines of *Satyagraha* [literally 'truth force', Mohandas K. Gandhi's word for nonviolence] . . .It was never more true than now that the world is lost and cannot see true values. Let us keep on praying for one another."[92] Merton was committed to the dignity of human life that was not reducible to juridical sanction. In his letter, Merton associated Day's civil disobedience against nuclear preparedness with Gandhi's *satyagraha* to draw out the notion of defensive civil disobedience against laws that deformed the moral integrity of the person. This sense of integrity of conscience was integral to the Catholic Worker movement at that time. Robert Ludlow, a former conscientious objector and for a time the associate editor of the *Catholic Worker,* introduced Gandhian nonviolence to its

[89] Ivan Illich, "Friendship," in *The Rivers North of the Future*, ed. David Cayley (Toronto, ON: Ananse, 2005), 148; Nigel Martin, "Beyond the Politics of Peacemaking: Retrieving the Mystery of Hospitality," in *Across the Rim of Chaos*, ed. Angus Stuart (Radstock: Thomas Merton Society of Great Britain and Ireland, 2005), 73-80.

[90] Stephen Pope, "Catholic Social Thought and the American Experience," in *American Catholics and Civic Engagement: A Distinctive Voice*, ed. Margaret O'Brien Steinfels (New York: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2004), 32.

[91] Merton to Dorothy Day, July 9, 1959, Section A: Correspondence, TMC.

[92] Merton, "Letter to Dorothy Day" (July 9, 1959), in *The Hidden Ground of Love*, ed. Shannon, 136-137; Forest, *Living with Wisdom*, 124.

readers.[93] Gandhism was attractive to the Catholic Worker movement for three reasons: it was spiritually based; it justified and explained the value of moral-based social action by individuals or small minorities; and most appealing, it suggested that pacifism could be socially transformative.[94] Day and Merton both realised that radical pacifism was part of a Christian tradition, but which was virtually unknown to mainstream American Catholics.

Merton renewed his correspondence with Day in 1961 at a moment when Day's vision for the Catholic Worker was embracing Christian traditions of nonviolence as embodied in Benedictine monastic *ascesis* that Merton embodied in his writings. Merton got back in contact with Dorothy Day in New York on 23 August 1961, motivated by his wish for his writings to be more authentically grounded in her work of radical pacifism, as Merton confided: "I don't feel that I can in conscience, at a time like this go on writing just about things like meditation . . . I think I have to face the big issues, the life-and-death issues."[95] Here, Merton was addressing Day through his self-avowal that required him to disavow his complicity through his writing life with his community's contribution to capitalism. Merton's disavowal concerned the New York publisher Farrar, Straus, and Cudahy that had entered into contract on 15 September 1960 with the Abbey of Our Lady of Gethsemani on Merton's behalf for a six book deal for $25,000 on themes of Catholic spirituality.[96] The implication of Merton's letter to Day was that his new social turn manifested the

[93] Helene Slessarev-Jamir, *Prophetic Activism: Progressive Religious Justice Movements in Contemporary America* (New York: New York University Press, 2011), 173.
[94] Mel Piehl, "The Catholic Worker and Peace in the Early Cold War Era," in *American Catholic Pacifism: The Influence of Dorothy Day and the Catholic Worker Movement*, eds. Anne Klejment and Nancy Roberts (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1996), 82-89.
[95] Merton to Dorothy Day, August 23, 1961, Section A: Correspondence, TMC; Merton "Letter to Dorothy Day" (August 23, 1961), in *The Hidden Ground of Love*, ed. Shannon, 140.
[96] "Letter from Roger Straus to Warren Sullivan" (July 24, 1963) *The Letters of Robert Giroux and Thomas Merton*, ed. Patrick Samway (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2015), 303.

Christian tradition of prophecy and protest through his parrhesiastic frankness that countered the silence of American Catholicism on the existential threat of nuclear weapons. Merton's disavowal of his earlier writings in order to avow his new departure in social engagement was primarily a performance of his *ascesis*.

Merton's weak commitment to the state meant that he shared similar ethical perspectives to the Catholic Worker as being a Christian anarchist movement at its core. Dorothy Day recommended to James Forest, editor of the *Catholic Worker* newspaper, that he should invite Merton to make a statement against war.[97] The newspaper, however, had a limited national weekly circulation between 65,000 and 190,000 copies selling for one cent a copy.[98] Merton was seeking to balance his writing with his vocation and so a limited circulation suited his brand of dissent best because it allowed him an outlet while avoiding the disapproval of his monastic authorities who did not regard it as appropriate for monks to engage in secular politics. Merton treaded a fine line between his motivations and obligations.

James Forest, a volunteer with the Catholic Worker in New York, wrote to Merton urging him to speak out against a paranoia gripping the nation in the autumn of 1961.[99] Forest had first encountered Merton through reading *The Seven Storey Mountain* in 1959 and he was enthralled by the testimony of this conversion narrative as it reflected his own transitional state at that moment.[100] Forest was twenty years old and had recently converted to the Roman Catholic Church in 1960 and he had requested a discharge from the U.S. Navy on the

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[97] Jim Forest in discussion with James Cronin, Edinburgh, Scotland, UK, December 9, 2018.
[98] Massa, *Catholics and American Culture*, 119; John Howard Yoder, *Nonviolence: A Brief History. The Warsaw Lectures*, eds. Paul Martens, Matthew Porter, and Myles Werntt (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2010), 114.
[99] Forest, *The Root of War is Fear*, 106-11.
[100] Ibid, 19.

grounds of being a conscientious objector because of his belief that a nuclear war could not be fought as a just cause.[101] After his discharge in 1961, Forest had joined the Catholic Worker community in New York City.[102] Forest would play a pivotal role through correspondence in introducing Merton to his pacifist interlocutors during the year of the *Cold War Letters*. It is fair to say that Merton could not have had the reach within pacifist networks without the assistance of Forest and Day at the Catholic Worker in New York. In 1962, Forest contributed to the formation of the American branch of Pax in affiliation with the English Catholic peace movement by the same name. Pax concentrated on working for change within the institutional church, and actively lobbied for the pacifist position at Vatican II. In 1964, Forest, Tom Cornel and Marty Corbin joined with Daniel Berrigan, S.J., to form the Catholic Peace Fellowship (CPF), in affiliation with the Protestant Fellowship of Reconciliation. The CPF sought to integrate Catholic peace activities into the wider American peace movement, as well as continue the Catholic Worker tradition of civil disobedience and nonviolent resistance to war. Thus, by 1964 the Catholic Worker, Pax, and the CPF constituted the backbone of the first viable American Catholic peace movement that would go on to counsel American Catholic conscientious objectors during the Vietnam War.[103]

Cold War America was a weak contract state and the value of survival narratives was to manufacture a consensus by employing "emotion management"

[101] Jim Forest, *Writing Straight With Crooked Lines: A Memoir* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2020), 84-90.
[102] Ibid, 21.
[103] William Au, "American Catholics and the Dilemma of War 1960-1980," *U.S Catholic Historian* 4, no. 1 (1984): 67.

by marshalling the affective domains of home and family.[104] A factor influencing citizen behaviour in a time of crisis is that communications are provided from a credible source and are empathic in nature. Too often emergency plans focus almost exclusively on facilities, hardware, and systems without sufficient consideration for the people these potentially affect. Kennedy assured the American public that his administration would inform citizens on how to protect themselves and their families in the event of a surprise nuclear attack by the Soviet Union.[105] Congress caught the mood, and within sixteen days of Kennedy's address on 25 July 1961 had sanctioned $207 million that the administration had requested to identify, mark, and stock buildings that could serve as community fallout shelters.[106] Kennedy's national address reinforced what the public had come to believe: they were soldiers in the Cold War and their backyards had become front lines. Their freedom to choose whether or not to build their own private shelter was emblematic of the survival of the nation.[107]

The Kennedy administration's over-enthusiastic endorsement of home fallout shelters in 1961 attracted a firestorm of public controversy that severely compromised later efforts to cultivate political and popular support for the community shelter programme. Whereas, the civil defence programmes of the 1950s had rarely found themselves the targets of outright hostility in the mainstream media, in the context of the Berlin crisis the administration's ill-

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[104] Elena Trubina, "'Horrified and Proud': Cold War Ethics in American and Russian Acts of Remembering," *American Studies International* 41, no. 1/2 (2003): 35.

[105] John F. Kennedy, "Radio and Television Report to the American People on the Berlin Crisis," 25 July 1961 in *Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States: John F. Kennedy, 1961*. (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1962), 533-40.

[106] "Kennedy Says We'll Fight for Berlin; Asks $3.5 Billion More for Defense," *Washington Post*, July 26, 1961, 1; Rose, *One Nation Underground*, 3, fig. 1., 37.

[107] Robert Jacobs, "'There Are No Civilians; We Are All at War': Nuclear War Shelter and Survival Narratives during the Early Cold War," *The Journal of American Culture* 20, no.4 (2007): 401; Robert Jacobs, *The Dragon's Tail: Americans Face the Atomic Age* (Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 2010), 61.

conceived civil defence publicity campaign caused the public to transfer part of its anxiety to the building of domestic fallout shelters.[108]

A perspective on the fallout shelter as a metaphor for American "toxic" individualism in opposition to neighbourliness was presented to viewers through the national experience of television. Rod Serling's television series *The Twilight Zone* lampooned the lack of civility in the "Gun Thy Neighbour" debate.[109] An episode entitled "The Shelter" broadcast on CBS on 29 September 1961 dramatically portrayed a neighbourhood scrambling to prepare for a nuclear attack and disintegrating through paranoia that exposed a moral deformation in American suburbia. The episode portrayed Hispanic and Latino Americans being repelled from the shelter door by their white middle-class neighbours, unmasking American racism and xenophobia at the heart of the suburban neighbourhood. Serling, in his closing narration, reminded viewers: "for civilization to survive, the human race has to remain civilised."[110] The episode was a portrayal of imagined fears of American suburbia as told through nuclear survival fears.

It was James Forest who informed Merton of the crisis atmosphere through correspondence. Merton had formed a partisan view of politics from his subscription to *I.F. Stone's Weekly*.[111] Stone wrote that a Catholic commentator, Fr. Laurence C. McHugh, S.J., signalled that a "neighbor" was no longer a friend, but a potential enemy through this priest's recommendation that Americans were advised to arm themselves in their home shelters:

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[108] Geist, *Armageddon Insurance*, 163.

[109] Paul Boyer, "Sixty Years and Counting: Nuclear Themes in American Culture," in *Understanding the Imaginary War*, eds. Matthew Grant and Benjamin Ziemann (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2016), 80.

[110] *The Twilight Zone*, season 3, episode 3, "The Shelter," directed by Lamont Johnson, written by Rod Serling, WCBS, September 29, 1961.

[111] Paul Wilkes, "An Interview with W.H. (Ping) Ferry about Thomas Merton," *Merton Annual* 24 (2011): 41.

> A priest in the Jesuit weekly *America* now declares it is moral to use violence, even to kill, in order to keep others out of one's shelter. [. . .] This is what the private shelter program does to us. It puts every man on his own. It says the government can start a war but it is up to the individual to fend for himself. [. . .] A community, a nation, is more than a number of people. It is a living thing bound together by shared experiences, values, interests and devotion. Dissolve these, put every man on his own, make every other man his potential enemy, and you have destroyed what you talked of defending. Something precious, something we liked to think of as American in the best sense, is already slipping from us.[112]

Stone, a politically outspoken reporter of the American Left, alerted citizens to the erosion of American values and he perceived Fr. McHugh as contributing to the erosion of neighbourliness through his brand of pragmatic shelter ethics. It was Stone's perception that McHugh had reinforced rhetorical framing of U.S. citizens as frontline defenders in his article "Ethics at the Shelter Doorway" published by *America* in September 1961.[113] McHugh was responding to the crisis atmosphere, rather than endorsing any particular moral code or line of action, and he left the final decision to the consciences of Americans themselves.

Merton took Forest's evaluation of the national mood at face value because he perceived the shelter scare as amplifying the need for personal conversion for authentic political action. His opening gambit in support of radical pacifists in the Catholic Worker movement involved a modicum of subterfuge. Monastic censors had passed the manuscript of *New Seeds of Contemplation,* in which "The Root of War" was a chapter, during the summer of 1961. Merton avoided submitting the incendiary paragraphs that prefaced the original essay for further censorship so that it could be published by the *Catholic Worker* newspaper. Merton had written to Dorothy Day on 22 September 1961 to offer his essay "The Root of War is Fear" for publication. Merton had written

[112] Isidore Stone, "Neighbor Changes Its Meaning," *I.F. Stone's Weekly*, October 9, 1961, 2.
[113] Laurence McHugh, "Ethics at the Shelter Doorway," *America* (New York), September, 30, 1961, 825-26.

this essay before the fallout shelter scare and it had no direct relationship to that specific event. Merton was applying his monastic *ascesis* to discern between the "true self" and the "false self" as an enquiry into what it meant to be human in a techno-scientific society. This mode of argument evoked Thomistic "*dignitas*" asserting that human beings have dignity by virtue of what they can become through the choices they make, as free persons, to either accept or reject the knowledge and love of God.[114] Merton ended his essay: "hate the appetites and the disorder in your own soul, which are the causes of war. If you love peace, then hate injustice, hate tyranny, hate greed – but hate these things in *yourself*, not in another."[115] Merton, here, was disavowing the "false self" through the archetype of original sin by which humanity chose to define the nature of good and evil on its own terms.[116] Merton's focus on the conversion of life had a political potency for Dorothy Day who engaged with the existential threat of nuclear weapons as being a moral problem because it implied intrinsic hostility. Merton, in his letter to Day, casually mentioned that he had added a page or two "to situate these thoughts in the present crisis."[117] The three prefatory paragraphs referenced the shelter scare as a catalyst to promote inner conversion as a ground for radical pacifism.[118] Merton advocated peace education, participation in nonviolent actions, and prayer as "resources for the fight against war."[119] These paragraphs did not amount to a programme for action despite the fact that Merton was encouraging readers to see the Cold War as not a fixed political situation.

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[114] Eleni Procopiou, "The Thomistic Perception of the Person and Human Rights," *Studia Gilsoniana* 6, no.1 (January-March 2017): 131-152.
[115] Merton, "The Root of War is Fear," in *Passion for Peace*, ed. Shannon, 13.
[116] Gen. 3 (Douay-Rheims).
[117] Merton to Dorothy Day, September 22, 1961, Section A: Correspondence, TMC; Merton "Letter to Dorothy Day" (September 22, 1961), in *The Hidden Ground of Love*, ed. Shannon, 140.
[118] Merton "The Root of War," *The Catholic Worker* (October 1961), 1, 7-8.
[119] Merton, "The Root of War is Fear," in *Passion for Peace*, ed. Shannon, 12.

In summary, Merton did appeal to radical pacifists because he was politically motivated by New Testament relationship repair, particularly the Sermon on the Mount that espoused the "Messianic Kingdom" on earth that opposed idolatry and expressed "justice and mercy that respects the dignity of the person."[120] This implied that the Christian had a vocational commitment to oppose the "idolatry" of the arms race and to protect the values of the democracy of everyday life that nuclear fears and the shelter scare threatened. The Catholic Worker movement espoused religious *agape* or love for both God and neighbour. Merton, through correspondence with James Forest, was confident that readers of the *Catholic Worker* newspaper would be receptive to his views and that he could contribute something positive to radical pacifism. Merton was enthusiastic to reclaim his relevance as a Catholic writer, but his enthusiasm displayed a political naivety regarding the reputational risk of his association with activists that was contrary to his vocational life as a cloistered monk.

Shelter Ethics

This section argues that the fallout shelter was a malleable metaphor that simultaneously signified American determination to survive, on the one hand, and corrosive American individualism, on the other. Merton and Laurence C. McHugh, S.J., considered themselves as loyal Americans and faithful Catholics. Merton was selective of his audience and received limited public attention. It was McHugh's shelter ethics that attracted national disdain for discounting the better view Americans had of themselves as good citizens and loyal neighbours. Shelter ethics, as a religious comment on the survival narrative, pointed to contested

[120] Matt. 5-7 (Douay-Rheims); Merton, "Christianity and Totalitarianism," in *Disputed Questions*, 130.

notions for Catholics of what constituted loyalty and faithfulness within the context of American civility.

Merton articulated a commitment to the dignity of human life and held a belief that Americans were religiously bound to "rise above nature" and to "*see the person.*"[121] Merton, however, was overlooked by the public because his espousal of neighbourliness did not conflict with mainstream American opinions of their better selves. By contrast, Fr. Laurence McHugh presented his readers with a utilitarian code of shelter ethics: shelter owners should think twice before rashly giving their family shelter space to friends and those who attempted to invade private shelters should be repelled by lethal force.[122] McHugh, a science editor for the Jesuit published *America* magazine, had not advocated for the defence of shelter at gunpoint because he left the matter for individual citizens and their families to decide upon as a matter of prudential judgement. McHugh's opponents exaggerated his bellicosity. McHugh became the religious stalking horse on the moral legitimacy of American citizens to defend their home shelters, by force if necessary. McHugh's shelter ethics, published in *America* magazine, appeared to bless privately built fallout shelters, stocked with firearms, as the moral means to maintain the freedom of families and the nation.[123] This was a mainstream American Catholic response to "Gun Thy Neighbor" in *Time* that depicted a Chicago suburbanite who proudly proclaimed that in the event of a nuclear attack he would mount a machine gun at the hatch of his fallout shelter to repel any of his neighbours approaching to seek sanctuary.[124] McHugh's

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[121] Merton to Dorothy Day, December 20, 1961, Section A: Correspondence, TMC, typed and mimeographed as Merton, "Cold War Letter, #11 to Dorothy Day" (December 20, 1961), in *Cold War Letters*, eds., Bochen and Shannon, 32-33.
[122] McHugh, "Ethics at the Shelter Doorway," 825-826.
[123] Rose *One Nation Underground*, 96 & 257, n.69.
[124] Davis, "Gun Thy Neighbor," 60.

response appeared to be controversial to fellow religious commentators, but it drew upon justifiable defence as a responsibility to others.

Merton constructed the shelter scare as a metaphor to reflect on his own concerns about the stance of a triumphalist American Catholic Church that seemed accepting of the risks of nuclear weapons. Merton justified his actions through his minor infraction of censorship that had involved sending uncensored paragraphs to the *Catholic Worker* newspaper for publication, as required, due to the urgency of the moment.[125] Merton, in his private journal, wrote that he had sent "some bits of [*New Seeds of Contemplation*] to *The Catholic Worker* (the war chapter with a little addition)."[126] This addition amounted to three short paragraphs in which Merton characterised private defence of home shelters at gunpoint as manifesting a "post-Christian" mentality in America.[127] It was for this reason that Merton recommended that the "Christian" task was to work for the "total abolition of war" as there could be no question in Merton's mind that "unless war is abolished the world will remain constantly in a state of madness" because of the "immense destructive power of modern weapons."[128] While these incendiary opinions would not have passed the monastic censors these fitted with the views of the radical pacifist James Forest who published "The Root of War is Fear" on the front page of *The Catholic Worker* for its October 1961 issue. The article was illustrated by a woodcut of St. Francis of Assisi, a model of communitarian personalism for the Catholic Worker movement.[129]

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[125] Merton, *Turning Toward the World* (December 22, 1961), ed. Kramer, 187.
[126] Ibid, (September 23, 1961), 164.
[127] Merton, "The Root of War is Fear," in *Passion for Peace*, ed. Shannon, 12; Patricia Burton, "Introduction: The Book that Never Was," in Thomas Merton, *Peace in the Post-Christian Era* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis, 2006), xxviii-xxix.
[128] Ibid.
[129] Merton, "The Root of War is Fear," in *New Seeds of Contemplation* (1962; repr., New York: New Directions, 2007), 112-22.

American pacifists used the language of "personal responsibility" to reaffirm the existence of a moral universe and inspire others to do the same.[130] Merton called on Americans to question their assumptions that the proliferation of weapons guaranteed security.[131] Merton wrote:

> What is the use of postmarking our mail with exhortations to "pray for peace" and then spending billions of dollars on atomic submarines, thermonuclear weapons, and ballistic missiles? This, I would think, would certainly be what the New Testament calls "mocking God"—and mocking Him far more effectively than the atheists do. The culminating horror of the joke is that we are piling up these weapons to protect ourselves against atheists who, quite frankly, believe there is no God and are convinced that one has to rely on bombs and missiles since nothing else offers any real security. It is then because we have so much trust in the power of God that we are intent upon utterly destroying these people before they can destroy us? Even at the risk of destroying ourselves at the same time?[132]

Despite political overtones, Merton's message was personal conversion of life as he wrote: "When I pray for peace I pray to pacify not only the Russians and the Chinese but above all my own nation and myself. When I pray for peace I pray to be protected not only from the Reds but also from the folly and blindness of my own country."[133] Merton followed this by stating: "I am fully aware that this sounds utterly sentimental, archaic and out of tune with an age of science. But I would like to submit that pseudo-scientific thinking in politics and sociology have so far less than this to offer."[134] Merton did highlight that "atomic scientists" were the ones who were most concerned with the "ethics of the situation" and that they were the few who "dare to open their mouths from time to time and say something about it. But who on earth listens?"[135] This was Merton's parrhesiastic frankness as echoed in his seminars to novices on the *Rule*

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[130] Leilah Danielson, "'It is a Day of Judgment': The Peacemakers, Religion, and Racialism in Cold War America," *Religion and American Culture* 18, no. 2 (2008): 224.
[131] Merton, "The Root of War is Fear," in *Passion for Peace*, ed. Shannon, 19.
[132] Ibid, 17.
[133] Ibid, 18.
[134] Ibid.
[135] Ibid.

of St. Benedict where he writes: "Witness the dullness and stupidity of atheist-materialist society and culture: the culture of people with no inner life."[136] Merton was critical of Americans resigning themselves to the security that weapons technologies could offer, but this should be seen as an articulation of the primary monastic focus of the conversion of life that aligned with pacifist emphasis on personal responsibility.

Mainstream religious opinion rejected private shelters that called for families to defend their individual shelters with shotguns against fellow Americans so that survivors could reconstruct civilization from the ashes.[137] Merton diagnosed the root causes of the "war crisis" as stemming from American passivity as not facing up to the nuclear threat. Merton wrote: "the present war crisis is something we have made entirely for and by ourselves."[138] Merton's parrhesiastic frankness was directed at the atmosphere of crisis as a manifestation of negativity within the psychic life of liberal anti-communism. The fallout shelter was a malleable metaphor for a corrosive individualism. Merton wrote: "It is not possible to solve our problems on the basis of 'every man for himself' and saving your own skin by killing the first person who threatens it."[139] Merton presented himself as being a sign of contradiction by virtue of his monastic vocation. He did, however, stress that his privilege as a monk gave no protection against nuclear risk.

Fr. Laurence McHugh became the religious stalking horse in this national debate on the right of American citizens to defend their home shelters, by force if

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[136] Merton, *The Rule of Saint Benedict: Initiation into the Monastic Tradition* 4, ed. Patrick F. O'Connell (Collegeville, MN: Cistercian Publications, 2009), 176.
[137] McHugh, "Ethics at the Shelter Doorway," 825-26.
[138] Merton, "The Root of War is Fear," in *Passion for Peace*, ed. Shannon, 24.
[139] Merton, *Turning Toward the World* (October 23, 1961), ed. Kramer, 172-73.

necessary.[140] Residual anti-Catholicism had been deflected, but not defeated, by John F. Kennedy's election as first U.S. president who was a Catholic.[141] Mainstream religious commentators reacted to McHugh's shelter ethics as demonstrating a "toxic" individualism and they called for the federal government to stock and mark community shelters as an alternative that would demonstrate the responsibility of the government to its citizens. Fr. McHugh sniped at moral objections to defending home shelters raised by Protestant clergymen. Episcopalian minister, Rev. Hugh Saussy, from Atlanta, Georgia, opposed the *Time* article as based on its lack of Christian charity. Saussy wrote: "If someone wanted to use the shelter, then you yourself should get out and let him use it. That's not what would happen, but that's the strict Christian application."[142] McHugh, in response, assured his readers that no Catholic moralist would condemn any man who used available violence to repel panicky neighbours plying crowbars at the shelter door who threatened the security of his family. Here, he adhered to Catholic teaching related to the preservation of private property during wartime.[143] Although McHugh avoided pronouncing any direct imperative on shelter ethics, nevertheless, he was sending a signal to Americans that he supported the *Time* editorial that endorsed the survival of the family as emblematic of the survival of the nation.[144]

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[140] The significance of McHugh as a stalking horse in the national do-it-yourself shelter debate is highlighted by McNeal, *Harder than War*, 113; Allan Winkler, *Life Under a Cloud* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 130; Margot Henriksen, *Dr. Strangelove's America* (Berkley, CA: University of California Press, 1997), 212; Rose, *One Nation Underground*, 96-98; Dee Garrison, *Bracing for Armageddon* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 218; Jacobs, *The Dragon's Tail*, 75.

[141] Thomas Wangler, "Americanist Beliefs and Papal Orthodoxy: 1884-1899," *U.S. Catholic Historian* 11, no. 3 (Summer 1993): 37-51.

[142] Davis, "Gun Thy Neighbor," 60.

[143] Thomas Slater and Michael Martin, *A Manual of Moral Theology*, vol. 1 (New York: Benziger Brothers, 1909), 322.

[144] Rose, *One Nation Underground*, 96 & 257, n. 69.

A dimension of McHugh's virtue signalling to fellow Americans that Catholics could be loyal citizens as well as faithful to their religion can be understood within the residual climate of the new nativism espoused by Paul Blanshard who defined the threat posed by Catholicism to American liberalism as equivalent to that of the threat to freedom as posed by communism: Rome was equivalent to Moscow. Blanshard perceived communism and Roman Catholicism as autocratic ideologies that were contrary to American freedom.[145] New nativism tapped into residual fears in non-Catholic America that Roman Catholics would threaten First Amendment rights of freedom to worship and freedom of speech if they became politically dominant within the United States of America.[146] By influencing law and public policy in such areas as divorce, censorship, and birth control, the Church had nothing less than all-encompassing Catholic plans for America. The accusation Blanshard brought against Catholics was that they were duplicitous in their views as regards religion and politics, willing to enjoy the benefits of religious freedom while a national minority, but determined to refuse those benefits to others should they ever become a majority.[147] Broadly speaking, Americans had difficulty picturing agreeable Catholics, who lived next door and whose kids played with theirs, as crafty fifth columnists, intent on helping the pope to conquer America.[148] Catholics in the United States were outraged by Blanshard's questioning of their constitutional loyalty and their religious allegiance. It was in part to respond to Blanshard's anti-Catholic rhetoric that Catholic theologian Fr. John Courtney Murray, S.J.,

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[145] Paul Blanshard, *American Freedom and Catholic Power* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1949), 9 & 303.
[146] Gerald Fogarty, "Reflections on the Centennial of 'Testem Benevolentiae,'" *U.S. Catholic Historian* 17, no. 1 (Winter 1999): 9.
[147] Blanshard, *American Freedom and Catholic Power*, 9 & 303.
[148] James O'Toole, *The Faithful: A History of Catholics in America* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2008), 195.

presented American Catholics as unquestionably loyal Americans whose value-systems were rooted in the tradition of the founding fathers of the American Republic.[149] Shelter ethics, as a religious comment on the survival narrative, pointed to contested notions for Catholics of what constituted loyalty and faithfulness within the context of American civility. McHugh intended shelter ethics to signal to Americans that there was no conflict between Catholics being faithful to their religion and loyal to the nation.

Americans favoured community shelters over home shelter provision. A cascade of letters to the editors of *America* magazine, from 14 October 1961, highlighted that mainstream readers opposed McHugh's shelter ethics. David F. Kellum from New York commented: "Even more grotesque is the idea of arming ourselves beforehand with an 'ethic'. Rationalizing our failure is human perhaps, but I suspect something less worthy in rationalizing done in anticipation of failure." On the other hand, Joseph L. Finger, Brooklyn, New York, praised McHugh: "the moral issues of the world today are on an intellectual plane. The Catholic Church, guardian of scholarship, is a most alert and vigilant sentinel of truth. She cuts through the encumbrance of fear to tread on the pseudo-religious tenets of the sentimental approach."[150] McHugh's shelter ethics became a lightning rod for how Americans imagined they would treat each other in an imagined future they were unwilling to face.

American Jewish religious leaders were some of the earliest voices to condemn McHugh for advocating "toxic" individualism through his shelter

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[149] John Courtney Murray, S.J., *We Hold These Truths; Catholic Reflections on the American Proposition* (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1960); John Quinn, "The Enduring Influence of *We Hold These Truths*," *The Catholic Social Science Review* 16 (2011): 73-84; Mark Massa, "Catholic-Protestant Tensions in Post-War America: Paul Blanshard, John Courtney Murray, and the 'Religious Imagination,'" *Harvard Theological Review* 95, no. 3 (July 2002): 319-39.
[150] "Correspondence," *America* (New York), October 14, 1961, 31.

ethics and recommended for the federal government to mark and stock community shelters as a public good. Staff writer, John Wicklein, of the *New York Times*, called upon Rabbi Herbert Brichto, a professor of the Bible at the Hebrew Union College's Jewish Institute of Religion, for an opinion on the *America* magazine article. Rabbi Brichto responded, "preparation for an atomic war, such as building fall-out shelters, is immoral. The moral thing is not to prepare for survival of a fraction of the human race, but to put all our efforts into avoiding such a catastrophe."[151] The Rabbinical Council of America endorsed the building of community shelters throughout the country, and suggested that Jewish congregations contemplating new construction make provisions for fallout shelters that would be open to everyone. Reform Jewish leader, Rabbi Maurice N. Eisendrath's opinion was that Americans were "abandoning all moral conduct" by building private shelters.[152] This now set the national response of religious commentators as the national debate gained intensity.

A perception of "toxic" individualism as opposition to neighbourliness, rhetorically evoked through McHugh's shelter ethics, had begun to marshal religious voices against do-it-yourself shelters. On 20 October 1961, *Time* magazine once more engaged in the shelter debate by quoting a rebuttal to McHugh's shelter ethics from Washington, D.C.-based Episcopal Bishop Angus Dun who called his remarks, "utterly immoral: the kind of man who will be most desperately needed in a post-attack world is least likely to dig himself a private mole-hole that has no room for his neighbor." Dun highlighted an absence of social justice in the economic burdens of shelter-building. Dun condemned

[151] "Shelter Defense Upheld By Priest; Protection of Family Called Man's Moral Right," *New York Times*, September 27, 1961, 17.
[152] "Rabbi Denounces Private Shelters; Eisendrath Sees 'Neighbor Shooting Neighbor' in War," *New York Times*, October 12, 1961, 16.

shelter ethics in order to advocate for community shelters: "I do not see how any Christian conscience can condone a policy which puts a supreme emphasis on saving your own skin without regard to the plight of your neighbor. Justice, mercy and brotherly love do not cease to operate, even in the final apocalypse."[153] Dun proclaimed, "only community shelters will insure the survival of the kind of people who will be needed to rebuild a world that has been devastated by nuclear war."[154] Dun struck back at McHugh's implied consequentialism, highlighting that the end justified the means, when Dun retorted that values were as important as the preservation of material assets if the nation was to rebuild itself from the ashes in a post-attack scenario.

In response to an American backlash against Fr. McHugh's shelter ethics the Jesuit editors of *America* sought to soften his seemingly uncompromising position on shelter morality by printing a byline: "Our guess is that Fr McHugh would be the first to step aside from his own shelter door, yielding space to his neighbor."[155] The *Christian Century* that opposed McHugh's shelter ethics had supported Paul Blanshard's portrayal of Catholicism as being the antithesis of American freedom by faulting it for foreign loyalties, domestic intransigence, censoriousness, and opposition to a free and vigorous intellectual life that posed as much a threat to American freedom as communism.[156]

Merton was at a disadvantage in the national debate because he primarily relied on snippets of information communicated to him by James Forest who was Merton's main source of information during the fallout shelter debate. Forest

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[153] "Civil Defense: The Sheltered Life," *Time*, October 20, 1961, 22; Jacobs, *The Dragon's Tail*, 76.
[154] "Says Morality Requires Community Shelters," *Christian Century*, October 25, 1961, 1262; Rose, *One Nation Underground*, 257, n. 71.
[155] McHugh, "Ethics at the Shelter Doorway," 824.
[156] Patrick Allitt, *Catholic Converts* (Ithica, NY: Cornell University Press, 1997), 310.

regarded "civil defense" as "a cosmetic phrase that we saw as promoting the illusion that nuclear war was survival and even winnable."[157] For Forest, who was the son of communist parents, privatisation of survival manifested the toxicity of American capitalism. Added to this, Forest's pacifist conviction perceived the shelter scare through the prism of his own conscientious objection that had resulted in his early discharge from the U.S. Navy in 1960.[158] Forest contributed to Merton's belief that nuclear preparedness signified preparations for war. This can be explained by the fact that Merton could not accept the paradox of nuclear deterrence that pre-supposed on the one hand that nuclear war was simultaneously possible and impossible, and on the other hand that the system was poised for war, so that the threat was credible. On 21 October 1961, Forest wrote to Merton that whole towns across the United States were preparing to defend themselves against fellow Americans. Forest wrote: "everyone has gone crazy, building fallout shelters and preparing to shoot their neighbors."[159] Forest was provoking Merton to contribute his voice to the cause of radical pacifism. Merton laconically noted in his journal: "What do the Russians need with bombs at all? Just get a false alarm going and we will all shoot each other up without giving them further trouble! A nice testimony to democracy and individualism!"[160] Merton noted in his private journal: "it appears that 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, for the use of non-violent

[157] Forest, *Writing Straight With Crooked Lines*, 109.
[158] Ibid, 90.
[159] Merton, letter to Jim Forest, October 21, 1961. Section A: Correspondence, TMC; Merton, *Turning Toward the World* (October 21, 1961), ed. Kramer, 172.
[160] Merton "Letter to Jim Forest" (October 21, 1961), in *The Hidden Ground of Love*, ed. Shannon, 256.

means to settle international conflicts."[161] It was Merton's construction of his moral framework that became central to how he perceived himself as best serving Americans by supporting abolishment of all war, not just nuclear war.

In summary, the spectre at the heart of shelter ethics was whether American Catholics could demonstrate their loyalty to the nation as well as their faithfulness as Catholics. A consequence of the debate on shelter ethics was that it prompted mainstream religious opinion to call on the U.S. government to take responsibility for the stocking and marking of community shelters. McHugh's shelter ethics drew criticism from the evangelical preacher Billy Graham, who condemned it outright: "I feel a primary responsibility for my family but I don't believe I myself could stay in a shelter while my neighbor had no protection."[162] Graham's objection to McHugh's moral minimalism had residual echoes of the anti-Catholicism that had dominated John F. Kennedy's presidential campaign in 1960 in which the Protestant churches had seen defeat of Kennedy as a struggle of national importance.[163] Protestant and Jewish religious commentators interpreted shelter ethics as divisive to the community because it questioned whether it was the responsibility of individuals or the government to offer shelter provision for the population.

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[161] Merton, *Turning Toward the World* (October 23, 1961), ed. Kramer, 172.
[162] Graham quoted by Peter Braestrup, "The Shelter Dilemma: Great Confusion Exists over What to Do," *New York Times*, November 19, 1961, 3.
[163] Shaun Casey, *The Making of a Catholic President: Kennedy vs. Nixon 1960* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 178.

Conclusion

This chapter has enfolded Merton's vision for a new monasticism in *Disputed Questions* as taken up during the year of the *Cold War Letters*. The implication is to demonstrate that Merton's political writings did not thematically break from his past concerns. The central theme remained the conversion of life, which was a dominant monastic trope. Merton rejected his monastic privilege as being removed from the affairs of the world. However, Merton's mode of veridiction had little to do with intellectual engagement with political events, but rather was concerned with competing regimes of truth-telling within the ecclesiastical system: monastic authorities valued the monk as being removed from secular affairs, whereas, Merton considered that the monk shared in the affairs of the world by basis of his common humanity and in this sense he was subject to nuclear risk like all others.

Merton tactically employed his early experiments in parrhesiastic frankness as an opportunity to directly appeal to Pope John XXIII to promote small-scale ecumenical dialogues, which was granted by Dom James Fox. Merton's parrhesiastic frankness set the pattern for forging small-scale alliances that had a direct relevance for how he responded to the shelter debate in 1961. This event gave him a platform to advocate for personal transformation to a receptive pacifist readership in the *Catholic Worker* newspaper at the moment when the American family became a site of rhetorical politics through the malleable metaphor of the home fallout shelter as a domestic response to the fear of Soviet nuclear attack in the context of the Berlin crisis in 1961. As a consequence of the government's weak messaging, people speculated with their families, friends, and neighbours to try to make the best decisions.

Merton's route from the cloister to the world was primarily through his correspondences with Dorothy Day and James Forest. Merton's opinion was that Americans could only achieve the freedom of positive peace if they overcame their psychological fears rather than choosing to project their fear of an imagined enemy onto their neighbours. The reason why Laurence C. McHugh, S.J., became a stalking horse in the national debate was because he was willing to face existential fear of nuclear war that Americans were unwilling to face in an imagined future. Shelter ethics, as a religious comment on the survival narrative, pointed to contested notions for American Catholics of what constituted loyalty and faithfulness. Merton's transgressions of censorship gave him a sense that he had contributed to the national debate as his conscience dictated.

Chapter 2

Merton and the Catholic New Left

(30 October – 20 December 1961)

On 29 November 1961 Thomas Merton wrote to James Forest, stating: "I am not a pure pacifist in theory [underlined in original letter]."[1] Merton's understanding of human dignity aligned with Thomistic "*dignitas*" asserting that human beings have dignity by virtue of what they can become. This ethos of human dignity held a potential that Merton perceived shelter ethics was reducing. Merton wrote:

> Perhaps we forget there are situations in which even the minimum demanded of a Christian can be "heroic." It is certainly true that one might be *obliged* to leave the supposed safety of a shelter at the risk of one's life in order to minister to the grave spiritual needs of the neighbour we so readily consider as a possible target for our rifle! . . . The struggle for survival, freedom and truth is going to be won or lost in our thoughts, in our spirit.[2]

Fr. McHugh had concluded, "in the Christian view, there is great merit in turning the other cheek and bearing evils patiently out of the love of God," but McHugh called this an "exalted brand of supernatural motivation" and referred to such motivated persons as being "heroic Christians."[3] Merton conceded that legitimate protection of private property, by force if necessary, did not strictly contradict

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[1] Thomas Merton, letter to James Forest, November 29, 1961, Section A: Correspondence, Thomas Merton Center, Bellarmine University, Louisville, KY, afterwards TMC.
[2] Merton, "The Shelter Ethic," in *Passion for Peace*, ed. William Shannon (New York: Crossroad, 1995), 23 & 26.
[3] Laurence McHugh, "Ethics at the Shelter Doorway," *America* (New York), September, 30, 1961, 825-26.

Catholic teaching.[4] Merton, nevertheless, did reject Catholic commentators advising ethical minimalism as being an acceptable ethos for survival.

This chapter argues that Merton's conviction in the dignity of the human person motivated him to appropriate the pacifism of the Catholic New Left in England that opposed deterrence as deforming the moral integrity of the person. This motivated Merton to criticise the "apathy" of "Catholics in the U.S" for not speaking out against the risk of nuclear weapons.[5] This chapter is orientated by the intellectual ground of radical pacifism that Merton enfolded within his monastic *ascesis* as teaching conversion of life to ground authentic action in the world. This aligned with Merton's aspiration to support the embryonic Catholic peace movement. The first section argues that Merton was attempting to balance his vocational obedience with personal conscience as he was seeking to support pacifists while attempting to adhere to Trappist censorship as a manifestation of juridical power. The second section argues that Merton imagined himself as assuming the role of pastor through correspondence to an embryonic American Catholic peace movement in imitation of Archbishop Roberts in London who associated himself with British Pax and who was a supporter of nuclear disarmament. Merton used his friendship through correspondence with James Forest as a route to peace activists and Forest, in turn, looked to Merton as a fellow traveller who embodied the legitimacy of the Catholic Church.[6] It was members of the laity, like Forest, rather than clergy, who were beginning to take

[4] Thomas Slater and Michael Martin, *A Manual of Moral Theology*, vol. 1 (New York: Benziger Brothers, 1909), 322.
[5] Merton, *Turning Toward the World* (November 25, 1961), ed. Victor Kramer (San Francisco CA: Harper Collins, 1997), 182-83.
[6] Donald Wolf, "The Clergy in an Atomic Attack," *America* (New York), November 4, 1961, 152-54.

the lead in fostering a faith-based pacifism.[7] The third section argues that Merton appropriated an absolutist ethical stance against nuclear deterrence from his reading of Walter Stein in England, but Merton went further by espousing that this radicalism was legitimate within Roman Catholicism because of tradition.

In summary, Merton wanted to be a pastoral support to Catholic pacifists while also avoiding negative attention from his religious superiors. Merton hid his pacifist sympathies in plain sight through his involvement in *Breakthrough to Peace* with New Directions publishing.[8] Merton trusted his collaborators at face value. James Forest, James Laughlin and Wilbur Ferry benefited from collaboration with Merton and each related to Merton a political atmosphere of crisis that reinforced Merton's own sense of the rightness of his opinions on the necessity for the abolition of nuclear weapons. Merton had a responsibility to inform himself and to test his convictions as an expression of prudence, but it is whether he acted as he claimed that is the case for evaluation here.

Obedience and Conscience

This section argues that Merton was attempting to balance his vocational obedience with personal conscience as he was seeking to support pacifists while attempting to adhere to Trappist censorship as a manifestation of juridical power. Merton's friendship through correspondence with James Forest was a free association uninhibited by juridical power of the religious institution. Merton had the freedom to express his criticism of monastic censorship to Forest through correspondence for the purpose of winning Forest's support in helping Merton to

[7] Claire Wolfteich, *American Catholics Through The Twentieth Century: Spirituality, Lay Experience, and Public Life* (New York: Crossroad, 1989), 59-60.
[8] *Breakthrough to Peace: Twelve Views on the Threat of Thermonuclear Extermination*, intro. Thomas Merton, (New York: New Directions, 1962).

circumvent censorship and to support him to publish as his conscience demanded as opposed to what Merton's institution permitted as being appropriate for a Trappist to publish.

Patricia McNeal in 1992 defined Merton's commitment to personal authenticity as initiating his "theology of peace" by which means Merton was attempting to, in the word of McNeal:

> move the Christian from passive resistance (a conscientious negative response to participate in a political action by the state that the individual deemed wrong) to a more active resistance (positing direct actions against political decisions by the state which the individual conscience had judged is wrong). It was at this point that Merton proclaimed nonviolence as the Christian's way to peace.[9]

Merton's pacifist writing was not as systematically developed at McNeal implied, but McNeal identifies Merton as being supportive of defensive civil disobedience against laws that deformed the moral integrity of the person. Merton's understanding of human dignity as aligned with Thomistic "*dignitas*" was central to how Merton appropriated transatlantic radical pacifism. McNeal only mentioned in passing the influence of Walter Stein, associated with the Catholic New Left in England, for Merton's pacifism in the *Breakthrough to Peace* anthology, begun in October 1961 and published in September 1962.[10] Merton's opposition to nuclear deterrence was not his own invention, but points to Catholic radicalism on the morality of nuclear weapons.

The transatlantic dimension of Merton's pacifism, which was mentioned in passing by McNeal, will be made explicit in this chapter so as to trace a connection between Merton and the Catholic New Left in England. This is enfolded within Walter Stein's symposium group that had mounted a quixotic

[9] Patricia McNeal, *Harder than War: Catholic Peacemaking in Twentieth-Century America* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1992), 121.
[10] Ibid, 113-14.

challenge to established and unquestioned Catholic acceptance of nuclear deterrence in Britain. This challenge framed possession of nuclear weapons as being incompatible with Thomistic "*dignitas*" by examining the ethics of intention as motivating action.[11] The Stein symposium group was connected to the English Dominicans and the activities of the British Pax Society.[12] American pacifists, who included James Forest, were seeking to develop an American affiliate of British Pax in 1961. The British Pax Society, unsuccessfully, took up the cause of trying to influence the Church to condemn the manufacture of nuclear weapons.

Merton did question the morality of the motives and the means of modern warfare, but his views were not systematically developed and were derivative of the Catholic New Left. This is a contextual consideration that has not been adequately examined in scholarship and is an important observation for evaluating the nature of Merton's pacifism as not unique in itself, but as indicative of a wider radical thinking at the fringes of Roman Catholicism. Merton, in effect, was mounting a similar quixotic challenge to Stein in England because Roman Catholicism accepted nuclear deterrence as a qualified means of preventing war and maintaining the international peace throughout the Cold War. However, the justification for Merton's challenge was based on the fact that the religious institution never considered deterrence as being an end in itself, but rather as a stage to eventual nuclear disarmament. The point, here, is that Merton went much further than the Roman Catholic qualified position on nuclear weapons by his opposition to all weapons of mass destruction as being offensive

[11] Merton to Etta Gullick, December 22, 1961, Section A: Correspondence, TMC, typed and mimeographed as Merton, "Cold War Letter #14 to Etta Gullick" (December 22, 1961), in *Cold War Letters*, eds. Christine Bochen and William Shannon (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2006), 38;
[12] Walter Stein, ed., *Nuclear Weapons and Christian Conscience* (London: Merlin Press, 1961).

in nature. The problem with Merton's absolutism was precisely because it was moralistic, dismissed Catholic qualified acceptance of nuclear deterrence, and did not take account of the working of diplomacy through political action.

The juridical power of the Trappist censors was primarily concerned with safeguarding the reputation of the religious institution. It was not enough for a Catholic publication to be free of theological error; the topic had to be deemed suitable for Trappists to address. The juridical power of the censorship process was primarily concerned with print publication. Merton did have more latitude to express his opinions through correspondence and this was where Merton's ethos of friendship mattered to him as constituting a free exchange of views beyond limits circumscribed by juridical power.[13] The ethos of conviviality through correspondence doubled as a form of disavowal of the juridical power of censorship to avow pacifism as Merton's commitment to the dignity of human life rather than as a tactic directed to political action. Merton writing to James Forest on 29 October 1961 expressed his growing sense of frustration with the Trappist censorship process that delayed approving his articles for publication. Merton castigated the censors as guilty of cultivating an institutional "holy callousness" indifferent to the moral urgency for institutional Catholicism to speak truth to power.[14] The reason for Merton's frustration was because his essay, "The Shelter Ethic," a further iteration of "The Root of War," languished with Trappist censors during October 1961 as the shelter scare reached its

[13] On friendship as an ethos in Merton's monastic *ascesis* see James Cronin, "Thomas Merton's Social Conscience in Formation, Correspondences with Czesław Miłosz, 1958-1962," *The Merton Journal* 22, no. 1 (2015): 23-33.

[14] Merton to James Forest, October 29, 1961, Section A: Correspondence, TMC; Merton, "Letter to James Forest" (October 29, 1961), in *The Hidden Ground of Love*, ed. Shannon (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1985), 257.

nadir.[15] Merton had sent his incendiary paragraphs on the shelter scare for publication to Forest, already discussed in chapter one, but the crucial point was that Merton had avoided clearance with the Trappist censors. Merton, through correspondence with Forest, was disavowing the juridical power of the censors for the purpose of avowing a pacifism that Forest embodied through activism.

The protracted process of approving Merton's writings for publication began in Trappist daughter-houses far apart from each other and the process was supposed to be anonymous and impartial with each censor reading articles separately. Before the Second Vatican Council Catholicism maintained the *Index Librorum Prohibitorum* ("List of Prohibited Books") until Pope Paul VI ended the practice in 1966.[16] In the United States, these regulations, intended to police faith and morals, helped shape Catholic American consciousness as readers, writers, and scholars.[17] A Catholic writing on theological topics was required to submit his or her books for scrutiny to an official censor who might in time grant a declaration of *nihil obstat* ("nothing forbids"), which would clear the way for the local bishop to give the book his *imprimatur* ("let it be printed"). The Trappist Order was a global religious community within the Roman Catholic Church with its administrative heart in Rome. For a Trappist author the process was more complex involving prior approbation by censors within the monastic order before the monk's abbot gave permission for the book to be forwarded to the bishop for final approval. Merton's writings were frequently censored by the Master Censor, Fr. Paul Bourne, O.C.S.O., who was a member of the Abbey of

[15] Merton, "The Shelter Ethic" ["The Machine Gun in The Fallout Shelter"], *The Catholic Worker* (New York), November 1, 1961, 1 & 5; *Passion for Peace*, ed. Shannon, 20-26.
[16] Una Cadegan, *All Good Books Are Catholic Books: Print Culture, Censorship, and Modernity in Twentieth-Century America* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2013), 105-22.
[17] Ibid, 125-52.

Our Lady of the Holy Ghost in Conyers, Georgia.[18] What has just been outlined was the elaborate process for all Trappist publication before the Second Vatican Council and can be classified as a manifestation of institutional juridical power.

Trappist censorship, as a mode of juridical power, was intended to regulate the interrelated processes of publication and reading for safeguarding Catholic faith and morals.[19] Spirituality rather than politics concerned the Trappist censors, Fr. Paul Bourne, O.C.S.O., and Fr. Charles English, O.C.S.O., independently reviewed "The Machine Gun in the Fallout Shelter," a draft of "The Shelter Ethic," and jointly gave their permission for Merton to publish in the *Catholic Worker* newspaper. What was at issue for Merton in this essay was Fr. McHugh's ethical minimalism that Merton perceived was reducing Thomistic "*dignitas*" and so was detrimental to the ethos of survival. McHugh viewed the Sermon on the Mount as an "exalted brand of supernatural motivation" and Christians who were its strict adherents were "heroic Christians."[20] Merton argued that McHugh's moral pragmatism was a violation of Christian charity; a view Merton also shared with Dorothy Day.[21] Of course, Day drew inspiration from Gandhi's *satyagraha* to draw out the notion of defensive civil disobedience against laws that deformed the dignity or autonomy of the person. The only objection Trappist censors raised to Merton's essay related to the rashness of Merton writing and a need for further clarity of his argument. Bourne, in his report, recommended: "I see no objection to this present article, except that it seems to have been written rather hastily and his argument is not easy to follow

[18] Raymond Flanagan, *Burnt Out Incense* (Dublin, Clonmore & Reynolds Ltd., 1950), 292-300.
[19] Regulations for Censors issued by the Generalate House, Rome (January 5, 1952). Series 88, Section A: Correspondence, TMC.
[20] McHugh, "Ethics at the Shelter Doorway," 825-26; Kenneth Rose *One Nation Underground: The Fallout Shelter in American Culture* (New York and London: New York University Press, 2001), 96 & 257, n. 69.
[21] Merton, "Preface," in *Cold War Letters*, eds. Bochen and Shannon, 3.

without close attention."[22] Fr. Charles English, formerly known as Jack English, had been a managing editor of the *Catholic Worker* newspaper and was regarded by Merton's superior as being sympathetic to Merton's brand of pacifism.[23] The censors recommended that the article be re-written only for the purpose of clarity of argument. "The Machine Gun in the Fallout Shelter" was passed by the censors on 9 November 1961.[24] Both censors filed their reports with Fr. Clement de Bourmont, O.C.S.O., the Abbot General's personal secretary in Rome, who translated American censorship reports from English into French because Dom Gabriel Sortais, the Abbot General of the Trappist Order, did not read English, but whose permission Merton required to publish.[25] Merton was unusual in his activities within the Trappists. This was a religious community better known for prayer than publication.

Once the Trappist censors had cleared Merton's essay for publication he submitted his manuscript to James Forest under the title "The Machine Gun in the Fallout Shelter" although it was finally published as "The Shelter Ethic" in the *Catholic Worker*.[26] Forest, as the newspaper's managing editor took direction from Dorothy Day to change the title of Merton's essay to conform to the pacifist newspaper's editorial policy that espoused the absolute pacifism of the Catholic

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[22] Merton, "The Machine Gun in the Fallout Shelter," November 7, 1961, Series 87 # 02, Section A: Correspondence, TMC.

[23] Dorothy Day, "On Pilgrimage: The Story of Jack English's First Mass," *The Catholic Worker* (New York), March 1, 1959, 1, 7 & 8.

[24] Trappist censors Fr. Paul Bourne, O.C.S.O. and Fr. Charles English, O.C.S.O., "The Machine Gun in the Fallout Shelter," November 7, 1961, Series 87 # 02, Section A: Correspondence, TMC.

[25] Dom M. Laurence Bourget, "Thomas Merton: A Monk Who 'Succeeded': An Interview by Correspondence with Dom M. Laurence Bourget, O.S.C.O.," Jonathan Montaldo, *Merton Annual* 12 (1999): 44-45.

[26] Fr. Paul Bourne O.C.S.O, and Fr. Charles English, O.C.S.O., "The Machine Gun in the Fallout Shelter" (October 28, 1961), Section A: Correspondence, TMC.

Worker movement.[27] Day held a commitment to the dignity of human life that could not justify killing.[28] Merton argued that Christian pacifism was not passive. His argument was that passive acquiescence of nuclear preparedness was not active pacifism and those "who imagine that this kind of apathy is nonviolent resistance are doing a great disservice to the cause of truth and confusing heroism with degenerate and apathetic passivity."[29] McHugh presented a form of prudential judgement because he left the final decision to the shelter owner as to whether to take firearms into the shelter or not. What Merton espoused was a human dignity aligned with Thomistic "*dignitas*" asserting that human beings have dignity by virtue of what they can become.

Subsidiarity moderated the juridical power of the Trappist institution and there was a degree of latitude within its community structure. However, Merton's article only passed censorship because Fr. Charles English, a former member of the Catholic Worker movement, was a sympathetic reader. This was the Trappist censor who would play an instrumental role in forthcoming months in steering Merton's controversial articles through censorship with the tacit support of Merton's immediate superior, Dom James Fox, who had arranged for Fr. Charles to smooth the passage of Merton's essays through the censorship process. While, in theory, the censorship statutes appear restrictive, the practical application of these statutes by American Trappists reflected a rationale that both respected the doctrine of the Roman Catholic Church, but was also governed by subsidiarity at local community level.[30] The faith-based perspective on the possession and use

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[27] Merton, "Letter to James Forest," (November 29, 1961), in *The Hidden Ground of Love*, ed. Shannon, 259.
[28] McNeal, interview with James Forest, December 3, 1972, *Harder than War*, 116 & 277, n. 31.
[29] Merton, "The Shelter Ethic," in *Passion for Peace*, ed. Shannon, 24-25.
[30] Cadegan, *All Good Books are Catholic Books*, 105-22.

of nuclear weapons as being an existential matter meant that there were pockets of support for radical pacifism within the institutional Catholic Church and it was not restricted to the fringes as represented by the Catholic Worker movement.

In summary, Merton walked a fine line between conscience and obedience. It was for this reason that Merton felt the need to restrain James Forest at the *Catholic Worker* from going too soon to press with his articles before these had been approved by the Trappist censors.[31] Merton needed and depended on Forest to introduce him into his pacifist networks; Forest needed Merton, a celebrity Catholic writer, to support his political pacifism. Merton's commitment to the dignity of human life gave a symbolic value to the moral integrity of political pacifists in their opposition to the resumption of U.S. atmospheric testing as threatening the biosphere through nuclear fallout.

Pastor to the Peace Movement

This section argues that Merton imagined himself as assuming, through correspondence, an informal role as pastor to an embryonic American Catholic peace movement. Merton's model was Archbishop Roberts in London. Merton used the freedom of his friendship with James Forest to bolster his support for peace activists and Forest looked to Merton as a fellow traveller who embodied the legitimacy of the Catholic Church. The tension for Merton was that he wanted to support Catholic pacifists while also avoiding negative attention from his religious superiors for his conscience position on the abolishment of war.

Faith-based pacifists were divided along denominational lines in the United States. In 1961, tentative ecumenical dialogues between Catholics and

[31] Merton, "Letter to James Forest" (November 14, 1961), in *The Hidden Ground of Love*, ed. Shannon, 258.

Protestants was beginning, but both Christian denominations misunderstood each other and were suspicious of one another.[32] The American Pax intended to educate Catholics in Catholic social teaching that would inform them that Christian pacifism was a legitimate moral position that was obscured by the magisterial acceptance of just war teaching that legitimated Catholic qualified acceptance of nuclear deterrence.[33] The prospect of attracting Merton as a sponsor for a new Catholic peace group prompted Dorothy Day and James Forest to alert John C. Heidbrink to Merton's pacifist writings. Heidbrink who was Secretary of Church Relations for the Fellowship of Reconciliation (FOR) at its headquarters in Nyack, New York.[34] FOR carried its pacifism into the political arena.[35] The FOR was a conduit for Gandhian forms of nonviolent resistance to influence pacifists in the United States.[36] However, there was still ecumenical work to be done between Roman Catholic and Protestant pacifists.

Catholics reaching out to participate in an extensively Protestant peace movement were crossing the sectarian divide, but Merton's cloistered remove facilitated his covert ecumenical dialogues with peace activists. On 30 October 1961, Merton initially wrote to Heidbrink to offer support by granting his permission to republish his pacifist writings.[37] Merton's abbot, Dom James Fox, permitted Merton to exploit a loophole in Trappist censorship that would allow

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[32] Patrick Carey, "American Catholic Ecumenism on the Eve of Vatican II, 1940-1962," *U.S. Catholic Historian* 28, no. 2 (Spring 2010): 1-17.

[33] Anne Klejment and Nancy Roberts, eds. *American Catholic Pacifism: The Influence of Dorothy Day and the Catholic Worker Movement* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1996), 127-28.

[34] Merton to John C. Heidbrink, October 30, 1961, Section A: Correspondence, TMC, typed and mimeographed as Merton, "Cold War Letter # 2 to John C. Heidbrink" (October 30, 1961), in *Cold War Letters*, eds. Bochen and Shannon, 10-11.

[35] Ibid, 174.

[36] Helene Slessarev-Jamir, *Prophetic Activism: Progressive Religious Justice Movements in Contemporary America* (New York: New York University Press, 2011), 173.

[37] Ibid.

Merton's writings to be printed in magazines that had small circulation.[38] Merton, bolstered by the support of his religious superior, Dom James, encouraged Heidbrink to reprint "The Root of War" for limited distribution so that Merton could make a contribution while also staying within the boundaries of Trappist juridical power. Merton explained his limited action in a letter to Forest, as follows:

> There is one loophole in the censorship statute that leaves me a little liberty of action. When a publication is very small and of very limited influence (and this is not defined) articles for it do not need to be censored. Father Abbot has decided that we can regard the publication for FOR [Fellowship of Reconciliation] as falling under that category.[39]

Merton was keen to promote ecumenical dialogue between the faith-based pacifists while American Pax was still an idea rather than a reality.[40] Merton wanted to be seen to be involved, but he was not prepared to risk the security of his vocation within his monastic community by taking unwarranted risks which is why he chose to work within the limited means that Trappist censorship afforded him. There was a limit to personal risks he was prepared to take.

Through correspondence, James Forest introduced Merton to pacifists in Europe and this highlights a philosophy of friendship as opening up a discursive free space within juridical power as signified by Trappist censorship. Merton would not have had an entry to these circles without Forest's support. Forest introduced Merton, through correspondence, to Charles S. Thompson, editor of the *Pax Bulletin* the journal of the English Pax Society. Members of the Pax Society considered that the Catholic Church should assume the moral leadership against the use of nuclear weapons given its universalism as a faith-based

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[38] Merton. "Letter to James Forest" (November 14, 1961), in *The Hidden Ground of Love,* ed. Shannon, 258.
[39] Ibid.
[40] Merton, *Turning Toward the World* (October 30, 1961), ed Kramer, 176.

community. Forest aspired to act as editor of an American version of the *Pax Bulletin* and so he encouraged Merton to make contact with Thompson, editor of the *Pax Bulletin* in England. Thompson had converted to Catholicism in 1954 and served as editor for the *Pax Bulletin* from 1956-63.[41] The English Pax Society had grown considerably by the mid-1950s when its membership expanded from mostly pacifists to a number of intellectuals who could not accept the Church's qualified acceptance of nuclear deterrence, validated by just war theory, in a world of nuclear weapons. Dominicans in the Pax Society and Archbishop Roberts brought theological focus to the debate on nuclear weapons that was a regular feature in the *New Left Review*.[42] This Catholic New Left position was not supported by the hierarchy who were opposed to clergy and laity working on the specialist issue of nuclear weapons.

Merton wrote to Archbishop Roberts, S.J., living in London and who was active in the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament (CND), to express his intentions that he did not wish to tinker "with the big machine" of politics.[43] Rather, Merton's intention was, in his own words, "to clarify the moral principles" for nuclear survival through his nuclear pacifist writings.[44] For Merton the moral issue was his commitment to the dignity of human life. Merton's opinion was that the urgent task of the Catholic Church was to keep a moral inversion from gaining acceptance. This was the line of argument of radical pacifism. This placed Merton at odds with the religious institution he

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[41] "Charles S. Thompson," in *The Hidden Ground of Love*, ed. Shannon, 571.

[42] J. M. Cameron, "Morality and the Bomb," *The New Left Review* 1, no. 12 (November-December, 1961): 67.

[43] Merton to Archbishop Thomas Roberts, December 1961, Section A: Correspondence, TMC, typed and mimeographed as Merton, "Cold War Letter #9 to Thomas Roberts" (December 1961), in *Cold War Letters*, eds. Bochen and Shannon, 26.

[44] Merton to Msgr. John Tracy Ellis, February 4, 1962, Section A: Correspondence, TMC, typed and mimeographed as Merton "Cold War Letter #29 to John Tracy Ellis" (February 4, 1962), in *Cold War Letters*, eds. Bochen and Shannon, 67.

claimed to be serving and was less likely to influence opinion both within the institution and a mainstream American readership.

Radical pacifists in the United States were predominately drawn from the Protestant churches with few devoted Catholic pacifist groups. It was for this reason that Merton was keen to support James Forest in the emergence of Catholic pacifism within the United States. In November 1961, Forest was seeking to form an American affiliate of the Catholic Pax Society in England and Merton was keen to add his support as a sponsor. It is clear that Merton only intended to lend his pastoral support through correspondence to Forest rather than involve himself in activism of any kind. It is important to stress, at this point, that Merton's focus remained firmly fixed on his vocational and writing life rather than on any form of political action.

Merton, through his friendships, was able to navigate a channel through the juridical power of censorship. On 2 November 1961, Merton wrote to Forest at the *Catholic Worker* to update him on the progress of his articles through censorship, as follows:

> The censors have . . . returned ["Machine Gun and Fallout Shelter"] fast and so news ought to come from Rome before Nov. 10 . . . I hope you can hold the issue for a day or two in case approval is delayed. You see it has to get back across the Atlantic and the General's secretary is in any case likely to be non-cooperative.[45]

Forest persuaded John C. Heidbrink of the Fellowship of Reconciliation, the primary anti-war movement in the United States, to reprint Merton's submission to the *Catholic Worker*.[46] On 3 November 1961, Merton wrote to his publisher James Laughlin at New Directions in New York, who held copyright, for permission to reprint this essay in a Fellowship of Reconciliation pamphlet.

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[45] Merton to James Forest, November 2, 1961, Section A: Correspondence, TMC.
[46] Jim Forest, *Writing Straight With Crooked Lines: A Memoir* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2020), 114-15.

Laughlin replied to Merton:

> I'm glad to hear that the Fellowship of Reconciliation people – I have heard of them vaguely myself, but am not just sure what their line is – want to do your "The Roots of War" out of "New Seeds" as a pamphlet. I assume that you want them to have this permission for free, which is certainly all right with us, in such a good cause.[47]

At the same time, Merton informed Forest about the censorship progress of "The Machine Gun in the Fallout Shelter" article.[48] Merton wrote to Forest: "I want to try to remain moderately articulate at a time like this when I simply have to speak, as so few others are saying anything."[49] This was only accurate up to a point, where Merton held back was in his unwillingness to take any personal risk that would risk his vocational life in his monastic institution. Merton never intended to become an activist, but rather to lend his support to what he considered was commitment to the dignity of human life.

Merton was an obedient monk, but he was not beyond proposing a modicum of subterfuge in support of what he regarded a moral cause like nuclear pacifism for committing to the dignity of human life. Merton came up with the proposal to Forest that Merton, himself, could be reported as a source of information on Catholic views of pacifism in future issues of the *Catholic Worker* newspaper. Merton wrote to Forest: "write a short article reporting on the appearance of my article and quoting bits from it, if you wanted to do so. I think this is a feasible way of handling material that would otherwise just get jammed up in the censorship machine forever."[50] Merton was attempting to retain control over his publications without alienating Forest whose support he required if his writings were to achieve a wider circulation within pacifist

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[47] James Laughlin, "Letter to Merton" (November 3, 1961), in *Selected Letters*, ed. David Cooper, (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1997), 186.
[48] Merton to James Forest, November 5, 1961, Section A: Correspondence, TMC.
[49] Merton "Letter to James Forest" (November 14, 1961), in *The Hidden Ground of Love*, ed. Shannon, 258.
[50] Ibid.

circles. It seems difficult to evaluate Merton's tone of frustration in his correspondences to Forest as genuinely being attributed to Trappist censorship. It is just as plausible that Merton was using censorship as an excuse to seek alternative publishing avenues through Forest that would allow Merton the freedom to offer his opinions without implicating either himself or his monastery and so avoid personal risk. However, the meaning of the exchange was also related to the confessional nature of Merton's writing as he disavowed religious acceptance of deterrence in order to avow pacifism as commitment to the dignity of human life that he espoused.

Merton was permitted by his religious superior to support pacifism through sponsorship of limited pacifist publications without reputational risk either to himself or his religious community. Merton initially wrote to Charles Thompson in Surrey on 8 November 1961 to offer his support as a Pax Society sponsor.[51] On the same day, Merton informed Forest that his abbot had granted him permission to become a sponsor of American Pax. Merton wrote: "[Dom James] . . .said it would be all right for me to be a sponsor of the Pax movement in America. I think this is very important and I am very eager to help out. You understand my inevitable limitations however."[52] Merton was cautious as he wished to be supportive, but without running a personal risk. At the same time, Merton asked Forest to circulate his articles to the progressive Catholic magazine *Jubilee*, edited by Ed Rice, Merton's former classmate at Columbia University, and to *Commonweal* magazine, so his writings would "get around."[53] Merton

[51] Merton to Charles S. Thompson, November 8, 1961, Section A: Correspondence, TMC; Merton, "Letter to Charles S. Thompson" (November 8, 1961), in *Making Peace in the Post-Christian Era* (London: Pax Christi, 2006), 39.
[52] Ibid.
[53] Merton, "Letter to James Forest" (November 8, 1961), in *The Hidden Ground of Love*, ed. Shannon, 258.

was torn between wanting to be supportive of political pacifism, but without running a personal risk that could have an adverse effect on his vocational life as a monk. Merton wrote to Fr. Daniel Berrigan, S.J., a future leader in the American Catholic Left, on 10 November 1961 of his commitment to pacifism and he was writing to Berrigan to request that Berrigan keep him informed. Merton wrote: "We are going to have to keep in touch with one another. I don't have eyes and ears down here and others have to do my seeing for me."[54] Merton who wanted his name in the intellectual forefront of the new movement, noted in his journal, with self-satisfaction, that no American bishops were listed as sponsors of the "Pax Movement."[55] Forest regarded Merton an acceptable sponsor because he was a cleric who supported the Catholic laity taking a leadership role in the Catholic peace movement in the United States. Merton's value for political pacifists lay in his celebrity as an American Catholic writer.

The intensity of the fallout shelter debate began to dissipate by late November 1961. Private shelters did not perform the political objective of national consensus-building and President John F. Kennedy was seeking to politically distance himself from a public relations failure as a consequence of the home shelter debate.[56] Fallout shelter owners were a special class of people whose affinity for the military response was especially strong. In a national survey conducted by the University of Michigan in 1961 only 18 percent of shelter owners supported a military build-up as a means of reducing the chance of war. Another 14 percent supported a firm U.S. diplomatic response against the

[54] Merton, "Letter to Daniel Berrigan" (November 10, 1961), in *The Hidden Ground of Love*, ed. Shannon, 71.
[55] Merton, *Turning Toward the World* (November 20, 1961), ed. Kramer, 181.
[56] Thomas Bishop, "'The Struggle to Sell Survival': Family Fallout Shelters and the Limits of Consumer Citizenship," *Modern American History* 2, no.2 (2019): 117-38.

Soviets, but 55 percent offered a variety of nonviolent suggestions.[57] Shelter builders were not as representative of American opinion as Merton believed and the association he drew between fallout shelters and a growing militarism in civil society was exaggerated.

President John F. Kennedy's weak messaging contributed to American public misperception of fallout shelters as signifying national preparations for a potential Soviet strike in the context of the Berlin crisis in 1961. Kennedy had asked John Kenneth Galbraith, liberal Harvard economist and his ambassador to India, to review the draft of a proposed shelter booklet entitled "Fallout Protection – What to Know About Nuclear Attack – What to Do About It." Galbraith's assessment was far from positive. His opposition was based the class bias that pervaded the pamphlet. Galbraith wrote to Kennedy highlighting the booklet's implicit economic injustices on grounds that it did not take into account the housing stock of the poor. He caricatured the proposed fallout protection pamphlet as a design for saving Republicans and sacrificing Democrats. Galbraith advised Kennedy that he could not support the sanctioning of a pamphlet which implied that better elements of the population could be saved while dismissing a poorer demographic who voted for the President. Galbraith foresaw a political and economic chimera emerging from "a helter skelter" shelter programme.[58] The draft of the pamphlet assumed that everyone would come out of shelters and return to their previous lives. There was nothing about the uncertainties and difficulties involved in decontamination, nothing that suggested that hospitals, doctors and nurses might no longer exist as before, no

[57] F. K. Berrien, Carol Schulman and Marianne Amarel, "The Fallout-Shelter Owners: A Study of Attitude Formation," *The Public Opinion Quarterly* 27, no. 2 (Summer 1963): 214.
[58] John Kenneth Galbraith, "Letter to President John F. Kennedy" (November 9, 1961), in *The Letters of John F. Kennedy*, ed. Martin Sandler (London: Bloomsbury, 2015), 295-97.

details about safe levels of radiation dosage or the area of damage that would be most endangered by blast or fire or fallout, given different sizes of nuclear explosives in a Soviet attack.[59] All the draft did was to oversell survival.[60]

American Catholic commentators considered that nuclear war was winnable or at least survivable. The target of Merton's criticism was bellicose American Catholic rhetoric rather than U.S. foreign policy. Merton mentioned his perception of a growing bellicosity in Catholic America in a letter to Pope John XXIII. On 11 November 1961, Merton wrote a letter to Pope John XXIII in Vatican City. Merton ostensibly wrote to offer his felicitations to the pontiff who would celebrate his 80th birthday on 25 November 1961. Merton, however, had an ulterior motive in writing to the pope at the height of the fallout shelter scare. He expressed criticism of American Catholics for being the "most war-like, intransigent and violent, indeed, they believe that in acting this way they are being loyal to the Church."[61] Merton informed the pontiff that an embryonic peace movement was developing in the United States bringing Catholics and Protestants together in ecumenical dialogue.[62] Merton's letter expressed a negative opinion of American Catholics as conditioned by his reception of the fallout shelter scare from the perspective of Dorothy Day and James Forest. This was a line of argument that Merton was drafting for *Commonweal* magazine.[63] Merton did not receive endorsement from the pontiff.

Merton's suspicion of cradle Catholics is reflected in his correspondence on 7 December 1961 to Msgr. John Tracy Ellis in Washington, D.C. in which

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[59] Fred Kaplan, *The Wizards of Armageddon* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1991), 311.
[60] Ibid, 307-14.
[61] Merton, "Letter to Pope John XXIII" (November 11, 1961), in *The Hidden Ground of Love,* ed. Shannon, 486.
[62] Ibid.
[63] Merton, "Nuclear War and Christian Responsibility," in *Passion for Peace*, ed. Shannon, 37.

Merton confided that American Catholics just wished to get ahead in society and so were willing to place political pragmatism ahead of faith. Merton wrote:

> . . . the general silence of Catholics, especially the hierarchy, on the war question is a grave scandal to very serious and thoughtful non-Catholic minds. It gives them the impression that we have really in practice forgotten our faith and submitted to pragmatic considerations and reasons of state merely in order to hold our "position" in the country.[64]

The religious rhetoric of a "scandal" implied either a snare or a stumbling block.[65] In Catholic moral philosophy, a scandal could be remedied through *correctio fraterna* or corrective criticism that was the duty of subordinates and superiors alike.[66] In theory, correction was to be administered within a graduated procedure of personal rebuke, witness rebuke, rebuke within the ecclesiastical community and recourse outside the ecclesiastical community.[67] Merton, through his desire to be an arbiter of moral correction, justified his engagement with the political life of America as a writer and a concerned citizen who could also claim to remain authentic to the monastic paradox of *contemptus mundi* ("contempt for the world") whereby the monk renounces the temptation to identify himself with society's aims. Merton was prepared to put his opinions in correspondence with friends he trusted, but he was more reticent to be forthright in publication and this can be explained as an expression of his prudence.

It was only by coincidence that Merton's opinion happened to chime with mainstream religious commentators who rejected McHugh's "shelter ethics" because the national mood had turned away from home shelters. However, on 25 November 1961, McHugh responded to his critics through *America* magazine:

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[64] Merton to Msgr. John Tracy Ellis, December 7, 1961, Section A: Correspondence, TMC, typed and mimeographed as Merton, "Cold War Letter #6 to Msgr. John Tracy Ellis " (December 7, 1961), in *Cold War Letters*, eds. Bochen and Shannon, 18-19.
[65] Slater and Martin, *A Manual of Moral Theology*, 198-202.
[66] Matt. 18: 15-17 (Douay-Rheims).
[67] David Hurn, *Archbishop Roberts, S.J., His Life and Writings* (London: Catholic Book Club, 1966), 77-78.

"Is the family shelter in particular an immoral device, because it puts survival on a competitive basis that favors the affluent and leaves the poor with nothing more than the hope of seeing God sooner?"[68] McHugh continued to argue that he merely proposed a pragmatic solution to weak messaging by the federal government on how citizens could best protect themselves as a matter of survival. Religious commentators supported the provision of community shelters because the economic cost of private shelters discriminated against poorer Americans. The Fellowship of Reconciliation pacifist association took the issue further by initiating "Shelters for the Shelterless" as a social activist campaign to build shelters as homes for the poor as an alternative to building bomb shelters.[69] Housing was a matter of social justice. Mainstream opinion had coalesced around the necessity for the government to provide community shelters. Americans had invested little in home shelters and waited for the government to equip them with places of refuge.[70]

Merton imagined himself as playing a pastoral role in the American affiliate of the Pax Society in a manner similar to Archbishop Roberts in London who was one of a few Catholic priests who had made his presence felt in pacifist circles through his association with CND and who was a conduit between the Catholic New Left and the Vatican.[71] The Holy See was beginning to reassess its anti-communist stance that had predominated under the pontificate of Pope Pius

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[68] Laurence McHugh, "More on the Shelter Question," *America* (New York), November 25, 1961, 267.
[69] Robert H. Cory, Jr., "Gifts to the U.N. as a Witness for Peace," *Friends Journal* (Philadelphia), April 15, 1962, 168-169.
[70] Gene Levine and John Modell, "American Public Opinion and the Fallout-Shelter Issue," *Public Opinion Quarterly* 29, no. 2 (1965): 279.
[71] Hurn, *Archbishop Roberts*, 52-67.

XII.[72] Communist parties in Eastern Europe considered the Catholic Church as a dangerous "reactionary" power. This perception began to change with Pope John XXIII. [73] While the pontiff continued to insist that no Catholic could accept the atheist philosophy of socialism, nevertheless, John XXIII made a novel distinction between ideology and groups, on one hand, and movements conveying those ideologies, on the other.[74] The English Roman Catholic hierarchy was highly critical of Catholics affiliating with the CND, because it brought them into contact with the political left, where they would be exposed to atheistic thinking. CND led Catholics into a more radical leftism, one that was fundamentally different from their earlier associations with trade unionism. This older leftism was given life by papal social teaching about the rights of labour and therefore had ecclesiastical backing. The bishops had no intention of giving their imprimatur to this new, more socialist-tinged leftism.[75] Archbishop Roberts attempted in 1961 to place nuclear weapons on the agenda of the forthcoming Second Vatican Council, but with little practical success. A disappointment for young Catholic activists was that their own weapon for promoting the CND agenda, Stein's book *Nuclear Weapons and Christian Conscience*, was refused an *imprimatur* by the Church. This refusal was for its critics a symbol of the Church's historical co-option by the political powers of the day.[76]

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[72] Frank Coppa, "Pope Pius XII and the Cold War: The Post-war Confrontation between Catholicism and Communism," in *Religion and the Cold War*, ed. Dianne Kirby, (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 50-66.

[73] Jonathan Luxmoore and Jolanta Babiuch, *The Vatican and the Red Flag: The Struggle for the Soul of Eastern Europe* (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1999), 112-13.

[74] Ibid.

[75] Jay Corrin, *Catholic Progressives in England After Vatican II* (Notre Dame, IN: Notre Dame Press, 2013), 189.

[76] Ibid, 199.

On 18 November 1961, Charles Thompson replied to Merton's request to become a Pax Society sponsor.[77] Merton responded to Thompson on 27 November 1961 regarding permission to the reprint of "The Root of War" and also mentioned his sponsorship: "I have received permission from my superiors for my name to be on the list of sponsors for Pax in America, I think there is no reason why I should not be on your list of sponsors if you think there is some point in it."[78] Merton was bolstered by support from Dom James without whose support Merton would have been powerless to engage in further action.

At the same time as Merton was opening up a conversation with the Pax Society in England he also reached out through correspondence to the Fellowship of Reconciliation to give his pacifist writings a transatlantic reach.[79] On 2 December 1961, Merton wrote to John Heidbrink concerning his commitment to reprint Merton's two articles, "The Root of War" and "Red or Dead: The Anatomy of a Cliché," as a single booklet. Both essays argued that the Catholic Church had a moral leadership role in the Cold War.[80] However, there was an ambiguity as to whether Merton articulated Catholic teaching or reflected his personal opinion. This may not have concerned political pacifists, but it did concern censors who needed to approve Merton's articles for publication.

Merton caricatured American Catholic commentators as whipping up bellicose nationalism as a means to justify the legitimacy of his pacifist writings as a voice of contradiction from within the Catholic Church. Fr. McHugh's

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[77] Merton, "Letter to Charles S. Thompson" (November 8, 1961), in *Making Peace in the Post-Christian Era*, Pax Christi, 39.

[78] Merton, "Letter to Charles S. Thompson" (November 27, 1961), in *Making Peace in the Post-Christian Era*, Pax Christi, 41.

[79] Fellowship of Reconciliation, *Two Articles by Thomas Merton, The Root of War & Red or Dead: The Anatomy of a Cliché* (Nyack, NY: Fellowship publications, 1962).

[80] Merton, Letter to John C. Heidbrink" (December 2, 1961), in *The Hidden Ground of Love*, ed. Shannon, 405.

shelter ethics was, in actual fact, a pastoral recommendation of self-help in response to the federal government's weak messaging on home shelter provision. This converged with the opinions of McHugh's detractors who argued that it was the responsibility of the government to provide citizens with accurate information rather than responding to public confusion through rhetorical optimism. A Thanksgiving weekend meeting of President Kennedy and his close advisors at Hyannisport, Massachusetts, on 25 November 1961, focused on how to deal with Kennedy's civil defence programme to adequately reassure the American public.[81] When Arthur Schlesinger, Jr. discussed the public perception of private shelters as designed to protect the socially privileged, Robert Kennedy laconically retorted, "There's no problem there – we can just station Father McHugh with a machine gun at every shelter." McHugh had become an object of satire as the public mood had shifted from private to public shelter provision. The president "speedily decided in favor of the public program," Schlesinger reported.[82] President Kennedy was committed to community shelters, but he failed to win Congressional fiscal support to fund a national shelter programme.

Although the atmosphere of the shelter scare evaporated as a media event as quickly as it had appeared, Merton clung to his metaphor of fallout shelters as a form of militarist idolatry that could sleepwalk the nation into war with the benediction of Catholic commentators. Merton explained his qualifications of McHugh's shelter ethics to Dorothy Day in a letter dated 20 December 1961. Merton explained: "to approach casuistry: if the person who threatens the life of my children, say, is raving mad: I have a duty to protect my children, it may be

[81] Edward Geist, *Armageddon Insurance: Civil Defense in the United States and Soviet Union, 1945–1991* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2019), 164.
[82] Rose, *One Nation Underground*, 98.

necessary to restrain the berserk guy by force."[83] Casuistry or case-based reasoning seeks to resolve moral problems by extracting theoretical rules from a particular case and applying these to a new context. Here, the issue for Merton was that Catholic appeals to ethical minimalism eroded Thomistic "*dignitas*" in an atmosphere of nuclear fear. McHugh offered the public shelter ethics to accommodate his imagining of post-attack survival. Merton argued to Day that he still held to his core communitarian personalist position that citizens owed reciprocity to their neighbours and were bound to "rise above nature" and to "*see the person*" to maintain the values of civilization worth surviving for.[84]

In December 1961, the U.S. government finally published its fallout protection booklet, promised since July 1961, to squash misinformation that had driven the fallout shelter scare since September 1961. Robert McNamara, Secretary of Defense, in the preface to the booklet, expressed resolve and placed emphasis on the value of preparedness to ensure survival of the individual, their families, and the survival of the nation:

> The purpose of this booklet is to help save lives if a nuclear attack should ever come to America. The need for preparation — for civil defense — is likely to be with us for a long time, and we must suppress the temptation, to reach out hastily for short-term solutions. [. . .] Still realistic preparation for what might happen is far more useful than blindness, whether from fear or ignorance. A sane and sober person can assume that, whatever comes to pass, he would draw on his reserve of courage and intelligence — and the unquenchable will to live — and begin to build again.[85]

The government pamphlet, with its emphasis on survival, optimistically reassured Americans that they would survive in the event of a nuclear strike.[86]

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[83] Merton to Dorothy Day, December 20, 1961, Section A: Correspondence, TMC, typed and mimeographed as Merton, "Cold War Letter, #11 to Dorothy Day" (December 20, 1961), in *Cold War Letters*, eds., Bochen and Shannon, 32.
[84] Ibid.
[85] Department of Defense, *Fallout Protection: What to Know and do about Nuclear Attack.* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1961), 5-7.
[86] Ibid., 22-23.

The pamphlet over-sold the still-unavailable community shelters while offering relatively little advice about how to survive in the post-attack environment. Originally, the administration planned to mail a copy of the booklet to every American home, but it abandoned this plan when the booklet received withering criticism for doing too little too late from both inside and outside government.[87]

The fallout shelter scare had finally run its course as the editors of *America* magazine published an erudite summary of the debate, which effectively ended American Catholic public pronouncements on McHugh's shelter ethic at the family shelter door. The editors of *America* commented as follows:

> Anyhow, the controversy helped raise the question whether shelters, like indoor plumbing, must become part of our way of life. If we need them, let's build them, however the job is done. The sooner they are ready, the less danger there will be that anybody is gunned down at the doorway by trigger-happy troglodytes.[88]

The editors echoed mainstream American opinion that it was the responsibility of the federal government to stock and mark community fallout shelters rather than the duty of individual citizens to provide personal security themselves.

Merton remained convinced that he could offer a moral corrective to McHugh's shelter ethics, but he did not have a systematic plan of action. On 7 December 1961, Merton confided to Daniel Berrigan his motive of "Laying down a barrage all around, and then when the smoke clears we'll see what it did."[89] Here, there is a real sense that Merton was aware that his writings could only ever be a symbolic gesture, but he felt that he had to do something from a position of conscience against the existential threat of nuclear weapons. Merton,

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[87] Geist, *Armageddon Insurance*, 163.
[88] Editors, "Current Comment: Shelter Morality," *America* (New York), December 2, 1961, 317.
[89] Merton, "Letter to Daniel Berrigan" (December 7, 1961), *The Hidden Ground of Love*, ed. William Shannon, 72.

at this moment, was reading C. Wright Mills, *The Causes of World War Three*, one of the authors who contributed to the new publishing genre on peace. Henry Pachter reviewed this new literary phenomenon.[90] Pachter highlighted how misleading it was for the American public because these "amateur diplomats" did not understand the nature of power in the international system and so mistrusted both diplomats and policy professionals responsible for maintaining the peace through a nuclear deterrence posture. C. Wright Mills was, for Pachter, an author who highlighted an "almost tragic instance the skewed angle of vision"[91] on peace because he did not appreciate the nature of power. Mills did exaggerate the power of the military in American society and the corresponding weakness of civilian social forces.[92] Merton considered *The Causes of World War Three* as, "one of the best of the good books on peace that are being written, for this country truly has a conscience and I am inspired by the fact."[93] A reason for this was that Mills looked to intellectuals and the clergy to be moral and cultural critics, interpreters, and informants to American people.[94] These were exaggerated fears because America remained a "weak contract state."[95] Officials needed to win the support of a myriad constituencies on both the national and local levels in order to put into practice anything beyond an insipid programme consisting largely of publicity campaigns. Interest groups wielded their respective vetoes early and often. Direct intervention of President Kennedy, the

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[90] Henry Pachter, "Amateur Diplomats and the Peace Literature," *Social Research* 30, no. 1 (Spring 1963): 95-107.
[91] Ibid, 96.
[92] Patrick Smith, *Time No Longer: Americans After the American Century* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2013), 108.
[93] Merton, *Turning Toward the World* (December 4, 1961), ed. Kramer, 184.
[94] C. Wright Mills, *The Causes of World War Three* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1958), 124.
[95] Geist, *Armageddon Insurance*, 250.

only enthusiastic civil defence advocate to occupy the White House, was not sufficient to attract funding for a national shelter programme.

In summary, the extent to which Merton acted in support of radical pacifists was conditioned by the institutional context of his disciplined vocational life that was both a liberation and a restraint. Merton wanted to avoid negative attention from his religious superiors for his private opinion on the abolishment of war and so he kept his commitments hidden through private correspondence. Merton did lend his support to James Forest to bolster his support for peace activists, but this was not widely known in November 1961 because the American affiliate of the Pax Society in England was still in planning because of the lack of financial support for the new society and the lack of coherence within the fragmented faith-based pacifists. Forest looked to Merton as a fellow traveller who embodied the legitimacy of the Roman Catholic Church. Merton exercised prudence by being mindful of his position within the religious institution and of Forest as a collaborator in circumventing censorship.

Emergency Pamphleteering

This section argues that Merton appropriated an absolutist ethical stance against nuclear deterrence as based on his commitment to the dignity of human life from his reading of Walter Stein in England, but appropriated this radicalism as legitimate Catholic teaching. Merton was seeking to form coalitions with writers who, like himself, in his words: “refuse to be satisfied with negativism and destruction, or with the despair that masks as heroism and prepares for the apocalyptic explosion in which all the humanized, social and spiritual values that

we know will go up in radioactive smoke."[96] Merton wrote: "One of the most absurd and dangerous of all prejudices is the popular assumption that anyone who doubts that the bomb is the only ultimate solution, proves himself by that very fact to be subversive. . . [contributors to *Breakthrough to Peace*] demand thought, patience, the willingness to face risks, in order to enter new and unexplored territory of the mind."[97] Merton was avowing pacifism as consistent with his commitment to Thomistic "*dignitas*" asserting that human beings have dignity by virtue of what they can become. For Merton, as previously for Jacques Maritain, the aim of the Christian in the world was to develop the potential of the whole human person.[98] Merton engaged in the project as a Catholic personalist.

Merton enthusiastically wrote a letter to James Laughlin to suggest his publishing house, New Directions, acquire the copyright of Stein's anthology published by Merlin Press in London. Merton wrote in support of Stein's symposium: "the contributors are young English Catholic intellectuals, mostly university professors, who think straight and right well. It is so much better than some of the good but loose, informal and meandering material by some of the older English Catholics."[99] Merton was fermenting the idea of sponsoring a writing project similar to Stein's anthology. Merton pitched the idea to Laughlin as follows:

> An idea has occurred to me for a ND paperback for next spring . . . It would be a hasty job but it is emergency pamphleteering and it would have to be done as fast as possible . . . I could contribute . . . another article on peace ["Peace: A Religious Responsibility"][100] which is being typed up now, and

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[96] Merton, "Introduction," in *Breakthrough to Peace*, 14.
[97] Ibid.
[98] Gabriel Flynn, "A Renaissance in Twentieth-Century French 'Catholic Philosophy,'" *Revista Portuguesa de Filosofia* 76, no. 4 (2020): 1576.
[99] Merton, "Letter to James Laughlin," (November 25, 1961), in *Selected Letters*, ed. Cooper, 187.
[100] Merton, "Peace: A Religious Responsibility" was the fourth redraft of "Nuclear War and Christian Responsibility," *Commonweal* (New York), February 9, 1962, 509-13 was composed of the second redraft "Peace: Christian Duties and Perspectives" which was unpublished in

> the *Catholic Worker* article, "The Root of War," which is a chapter of *New Seeds* with a special beginning added to situate it in the present crisis.[101]

Laughlin saw potential in Merton's pitch as a mass market paperback that could address the new interest in peace in the publishing market. Laughlin wrote: "This idea fits into something that has been in my mind about a year and a half ago. I wanted to do then such a little anthology whose focus would be in terms of satire against what I call the "Pentagon" mentality."[102] A spate of books had begun to be published in the United States with the common characteristic approach to peace as voicing the public's anxiety for mankind in the nuclear age. The genre of peace publications was suspicious of the professional diplomat and the disarmament expert.[103] Laughlin was appealing to this new market and saw the potential of Merton's Catholic celebrity associated with the project.

Merton believed that nuclear abolishment was the only legitimate ethical position for faith-based pacifists to hold in the nuclear era and he based his *Breakthrough to Peace* on Walter Stein's *Nuclear Weapons and Christian Conscience* that had emerged from a symposium at the Dominican retreat centre at Spode House near Rugeley in Staffordshire.[104] Five contributors to Stein's anthology were university lecturers: Walter Stein taught Philosophy and English Literature, University of Leeds; Elizabeth Anscombe taught Philosophy at Somerville College, Oxford; Robert Markus taught Medieval History at Liverpool; Peter T. Geach taught Logic at Birmingham University; Roger Smith taught at Liverpool College of Art. The foreword was written by Archbishop

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Merton's lifetime and the third redraft "We Have To Make Ourselves Heard," *The Catholic Worker* (New York), May 1, 1962, 4-6; June 1, 1962, 4-5. The fourth redraft was published as "Peace: A Religious Responsibility" that formed a chapter in *Breakthrough to Peace*, 88-116.

[101] Merton, "Letter to James Laughlin" (October 30, 1961), *Selected Letters*, ed. Cooper, 183

[102] Laughlin, "Letter to Thomas Merton" (November 3, 1961), *Selected Letters*, ed. Cooper, 185.

[103] Pachter, "Amateur Diplomats and the Peace Literature," 95.

[104] Brian Wicker, "Making Peace at Spode," *New Blackfriars* 62, no. 733/734 (1981): 314.

Roberts who noted freedom of conscience as being an appropriate Catholic response to nuclear weapons and he noted that the contributors "are far from regarding the absence of explicit official prohibitions, in this field of contemporary defence, as grounds for suspending the operations of conscience."[105] These Catholic intellectuals argued that it was because nuclear weapons constituted a new species of warfare that these weapons fundamentally challenged the just war as an instrument of justice. They were ignored by the English Catholic hierarchy who were suspicious of Catholic laity getting involved in moral debates that were the preserve of the *magisterium* of the Roman Catholic Church that held to a qualified acceptance of nuclear deterrence.

Members of the Stein symposium group were Catholic intellectual "Young Turks" who demonstrated a mixture of Catholic moral philosophy with Wittgensteinian analysis.[106] In this sense, they were engaged in doing applied ethics that had obvious affinities to *casuistry*. This is the tradition of case-based reasoning concerning ethical questions within rhetorical, legal and religious traditions, notably the Roman Catholic one. Hans-Johann Glock in 2011 observed that applied ethics historically developed as a "child" of analytic philosophy in the 1960s due to the re-emergence of questions concerning values and obligations in response to urgent social and political challenges.[107] Stein's applied ethics, as applied to nuclear deterrence, was based on the wrongness of intention as an open examination of claims in a rigorous pursuit of truth as follows: all practicable use of nuclear weapons involved the killing of innocent non-combatants which was wrong; it was wrong to have any intention to do

[105] Thomas Roberts, "Forward," *Nuclear Weapons and Christian Conscience*, ed. Stein, 13.
[106] Wicker, "Making Peace at Spode," 316.
[107] Glock, "Doing Good by Splitting Hairs? Analytic Philosophy and Applied Ethics," *Journal of Applied Philosophy* 28, no. 3 (2011): 225.

wrong; all deployment of nuclear weapons involved a conditional intention to use them, therefore, all deployment of nuclear weapons was wrong as based on the wrongness of intention. The logic of an absolutist argument against nuclear deterrence pivoted on justice. This argument can be reconstructed as follows: if a nation possesses nuclear weapons for their deterrence value, that nation is, implicitly at least, threatening to use them in case of nuclear attack. If there is no perceived threat, then there can be no deterrence value. Either the threat is real or it is not. That is, provided the government and military know what they are doing, either the nation intends to carry through on the threat and use the weapons under certain circumstances, or it is merely bluffing.[108] If it is unjust to do something, it is also unjust to intend to do it. So if it is unjust to use nuclear weapons, then it is unjust to intend to use them under certain, unforeseen, future circumstances.[109] It would therefore be unjust to intend to carry through on the threat. If both bluffing and leaving national intentions ambiguous or unformed also turn out to be unjust, then there is no just way to pursue a strategy of nuclear deterrence. It follows, then, that there was no just way to deter injustice through the possession of nuclear weapons.[110] One should choose the lesser of two evils: to disarm was tantamount to communist domination, but communism was worse than death, so it would be wrong to disarm. Stein's comrade Elizabeth Anscombe dismissed that all may be lost unless a nation acts unjustly as signalling the erosion of trust in God and a prideful misconception of human responsibility.[111] There was no doubt that the world of nuclear deterrence was pervaded by bluff

[108] Walter Stein, "The Defence of the West," in *Nuclear Weapons and Christian Conscience*, ed. Stein, 32.
[109] Ibid, 33.
[110] Ibid.
[111] Elizabeth Anscombe, "War and Murder," in *Nuclear Weapons and Christian Conscience*, ed. Stein, 45-61; Jeffrey Stout, "Ramsey and Others on Nuclear Ethics," *The Journal of Religious Ethics* 19, no. 2 (Fall 1991): 218 & 222.

and false bravado. It was impossible, however, to reach a general moral judgment against nuclear deterrence because of the bipolar world of the Cold War. Any move to unilateral disarmament held the threat of bringing about the very nuclear conflagration that was the imagining of the Catholic intellectuals. Nuclear deterrence may have been morally distasteful, but the political reality was that the "delicate balance of terror" held the international peace.[112]

Walter Stein was attempting to apply a logical analysis to the paradox of nuclear deterrence. It was for this reason that Stein's philosophical analysis was controversial, even within Catholicism. The basic flaw in Stein's argument was that it assumed deterrence as a static philosophical abstraction and it was for this reason that critical reception of the symposium was not without challenges even within Dominican circles that had fostered this radical lay Catholic view. Anthony Kenny writing in *Blackfriars*, the journal of the English Dominicans, pointed out that Stein's symposium had not quite succeeded in refuting the paradox of nuclear deterrence as "deterrence by bluff": it was not self-evident that the risks involved in nuclear deterrence were too heavy to take; and because it was very difficult to show that Western governments themselves had an immoral intention to use the deterrent weapons immorally in certain circumstances, it would have been better if the symposiasts had pointed to the fact that, if the operators of the deterrent must be ready to act on governmental orders to launch weapons against normal cities at a moment's notice, then it was psychologically impossible for them, at least, not to have wrong intentions.[113]

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[112] Albert Wohlstetter, "The Delicate Balance of Terror," *Foreign Affairs* 37, no. 2 (1959), 211-34. Ola Tunander, "The Logic of Deterrence," *Journal of Peace Research* 26, no. 4 (1989): 356.
[113] Anthony Kenny, "Catholics against the Bomb," *Blackfriars* 42, no. 498 (December 1961): 517-21.

The Stein symposium group, broadly supporting unilateral disarmament, advocated for the renunciation of nuclear weapons as a moral imperative based on wrongness of intention and this was a moral position that was orientated to justice. Robert Markus, one of the group, highlighted that the moral legitimacy of strategic doctrines designed to deter an adversary from the use of military force through the threat to use nuclear weapons against that adversary was based on a supposition that the retention of the H-bomb as a deterrent, involved an intention to use it, in certain circumstances, in a murderous manner. It followed that a Christian in England was morally legitimate to refuse military service, and must use what political means are open to him to bring about unilateral disarmament through nonviolent resistance. [114] Nicholas Wharton, in responding to Anthony Kenny's review of Stein's symposium, argued that if anyone wanted to make a complete case against all nuclear deterrence and for unilateral disarmament then they would have to show that deterrents involving no immoral intentions are evil on other grounds. In his estimate, the Stein group had not made a convincing enough argument.[115] Nevertheless, Stein received critical acclaim in *The New Left Review* as marking "a new stage in the moral discussion" on the arms race and prospects for nuclear disarmament.[116] The review was written by J. M. Cameron, a supporter of the Catholic Left and Chair of the Department of Philosophy at the University of Leeds who served on CND's Executive Committee and was a regular at the Dominican's Spode House, which had become a focus for Catholic peace activity. The reservations against the Stein symposium group highlights that it was impossible for moralists to reach

[114] Robert Markus, "Conscience and Deterrence," in *Nuclear Weapons and Christian Conscience*, ed. Stein, 65-87.
[115] Nicholas Wharton, "Deterrence by Bluff," *Blackfriars* 43, no. 502 (April 1962): 169-74.
[116] J. M. Cameron, "Morality and the Bomb," *The New Left Review* 1, no.12 (November-December, 1961): 67.

agreement on a general moral judgement about nuclear deterrence. However, the logic of the absolutist ethical position as primarily based on the wrongness of the intention still retained its ethical coherence.

Merton was not involved with the English debates over the qualification of Walter Stein's analysis of the paradox of nuclear deterrence. Merton did favour the abolishment of nuclear weapons, but he kept his opinions hidden and contained within the circle of his closest correspondents who were James Laughlin and Wilbur Ferry. Both were associated with Merton on the work of the *Breakthrough to Peace* project that was a protracted work that began in October 1961 and was published by Laughlin in September 1962. Merton was keen to anchor this work in the arguments of the English Catholic intellectuals because Merton shared through private correspondence with Etta Gullick at Oxford University his faith in Stein as offering a credible moral corrective for seeking a general moral judgement against the possession and use of nuclear weapons as incompatible with providing justice because of their massive destructiveness.[117] This went against the official position of the Roman Catholic Church that did accept nuclear deterrence on a limited basis.

President John F. Kennedy displayed little openness to peace activists because Soviet tests received less international criticism than the threat of U.S. resumption of testing.[118] On 30 October 1961, the most explosive atmospheric test during the Cold War took place high over the Arctic as the Soviet Union detonated a fifty-megaton demonstration device in the Novaya Zemlya

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[117] Merton to Etta Gullick, December 22, 1961, Section A: Correspondence, TMC, typed and mimeographed as Merton, "Cold War Letter #14 to Etta Gullick" (December 22, 1961), in *Cold War Letters*, eds. Bochen and Shannon, 38; Luke Gormally, ed., *Moral Truth and Moral Tradition: Essays in Honour of Peter Geach and Elizabeth Anscombe* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 1994).

[118] Shane Maddock, *Nuclear Apartheid: The Quest for American Atomic Supremacy from World War II to the Present*, 145-80 (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2010), 169.

archipelago.[119] John W. Finney, a specialist reporter on nuclear energy, caught public fear of radioactive fallout that further fuelled the fallout shelter paranoia. Finney wrote:

> In this Halloween season, a new man-made specter -- fall-out from atomic tests -- is beginning to haunt the world. How real a threat does it pose to present and future generations? There is no certain answer to this troublesome question that has reduced the diplomat and housewife to a common level of concern.[120]

In the New York metropolitan area seismic shockwaves from Soviet explosions were detectable.[121] The *New York Times* reported an imagined scenario that if the Soviet "super-bomb" had exploded in the air over downtown Manhattan its explosion would have destroyed homes as far away as Passaic, New Jersey, and would have ignited fires as far away as West Point within a radius of 45 miles.[122] This media imagining contributed to manufacturing an atmosphere of national consensus-building for the resumption of U.S. weapons testing as matching a show of strength against Soviet atmospheric testing demonstrating their strength.

American Catholics were unaware of Merton's association with radical pacifists because he restricted his views to a close circle of correspondents whom he trusted. A close correspondent was Ethel Kennedy who responded to Merton on 30 October 1961 in relation to a letter Merton sent her in September 1961. Although she was an outer member of the Kennedy political circle, Merton had written to her because of his personal acquaintance with Ann Skakel, Ethel's

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[119] Katherine Harrison and Matthew Hughes, "Mushroom Clouds in the Arctic," *History Today* (August 2013): 18-20.

[120] John Finney, "Fall-Out: What It Is And The Threat It Poses; The Nuclear Debris From the Bomb Can Cause Harmful Radiation but The Danger Level to the Human Body Is Still Uncertain," *New York Times*, October 29, 1961, 4.

[121] Walter Sullivan, "Big Soviet Blasts All 'Heard' Here; Air Waves From 3 Recorded At Lamont Observatory," *New York Times*, September 18, 1961, 2.

[122] "What 50 Megatons Could Do Here; U.S. Says Its Heat Would Set Fires 45 Miles Away," *New York Times*, October 31, 1961, 14.

mother, who had been Merton's first secretary.[123] Merton had written to Ethel Kennedy on 4 September 1961 asking her, in half-hearted tones, to communicate to President Kennedy his concern that America needed to maintain restraint against Soviet provocation as signified by the resumption of atmospheric testing on 1 September 1961. Merton presented himself as a reluctant political pacifist as he wrote: "I therefore hope and trust that every precaution will be taken to prolong the ban on nuclear testing as long as possible. . . Naturally it is not for me to say how you are to evaluate these ideas of mine, and I leave it entirely to you to decide whether you want to bother the President with them."[124] There is no archive evidence that Ethel Kennedy communicated Merton's message to President Kennedy, which was a half-hearted petition on Merton's part. Merton did want to do something in the cause of peace, but he did not want to commit to a position that could risk his religious vocation in his monastic community. In response to Merton on 30 October 1961, she wrote: "the prospects of getting the Russians to actually halt testing are dim and it seems to me the good monks at Gethsemani have the only solution – prayer."[125] An American Catholic, like Ethel Kennedy, did not believe that Merton would engage with politics because Trappist monks were cloistered and removed from the world and its politics.

At the same time as Merton wrote to Ethel Kennedy, he was also attempting to convince his publisher James Laughlin at New Directions in New York of the legitimacy of his publishing idea that could only indirectly include him. Merton and Laughlin reaffirmed their mutual commitment to the project. Knowing that Merton's vocational life did not allow him access to regular media it was Laughlin who wrote to Merton on 1 November 1961 to inform the monk

[123] Merton to Ann Skakel (1892-1955), Section A: Correspondence, TMC.
[124] Merton to Ethel Kennedy, September 4, 1961, Section A: Correspondence, TMC.
[125] Ethel Kennedy to Merton, October 30, 1961, Section A: Correspondence. TMC.

who did not have access either to television or radio that 50,000 women in over 60 cities across the United States of America demonstrated as Women Strike for Peace (WSP) in protest against nuclear weapons with their slogan to "End the Arms Race – Not the Human Race."[126] Composed of mostly white, educated, middle-class women, the WSP played into the domestic roles of mother and wife to call women to advocate for peace for the sake of their children. Laughlin wrote to Merton: "It gets worse and worse, so just you vroom ahead, man, somebody sure gotta. On TV tonight pictures of mothers with babies picketing against war and bombs all over the country, which is encouraging. But you would think the world had been drugged with something, wouldn't you?"[127] After this day of action, a loosely organised movement persisted in trying to shape the national conversation about the arms race and the dangers of fallout. WSP drew on their positions as mothers to urge governments on both sides of the Iron Curtain to end the arms race. The protests did not lead to an immediate political response despite the symbolic action to draw public attention to the health risks of nuclear testing in the atmosphere. Laughlin bolstered Merton's conviction of the righteousness of his actions. Merton's perspective was that the project was to remain a covert operation during its preparation for publication by New Directions and financed by Laughlin.

Merton wrote rapidly in short bursts within his hectic community life where he acted as novice master and community forester.[128] Because Merton contributed to the abbey's economy through writing he frequently had to work

[126]Amy Swerdlow, "Ladies' Day at the Capitol: Women Strike for Peace versus HUAC," *Feminist Studies* 8, no. 3 (Autumn 1982): 494.
[127] Laughlin to Merton, November 1, 1961, Section A: Correspondence, TMC.
[128] Paul Dekar, *Thomas Merton: Twentieth-Century Wisdom for Twenty-First-Century Living* (Cambridge: Lutterworth Press, 2011), 116.

on multiple writing commissions at the same time.[129] As a consequence, his criticism of nuclear deterrence lacked careful cultivation and the sustained critical reflection necessary to bring good intellectual work to completion. It was because of this reason that Laughlin introduced Merton, through correspondence, to Wilbur "Ping" Ferry who was vice-president of the Center for the Study of Democratic Institutions in California, founded by former president of the University of Chicago, Robert Maynard Hutchins in 1958.[130] Merton wrote to Ferry to extend his monastic hospitality:

> I want first of all to say that I am very interested in the work of the Center and would like to participate in it in any way that I can. [. . .] Finally, since I cannot come out there to discuss things with you, I would like to extend to you and Dr. Hutchins, or any other members of your staff, or anyone you would consider likely to be interested, to come to the Abbey for a couple of days. As Laughlin probably told you, I often have guests here for the purpose of dialogue and discussion. There have been lots of Protestant theologians, some writers, and so on. This simply means that a contemplative monk should have a quiet though articulate place in the discussions of his time, when the time is one like ours. I am sure you agree.[131]

Merton had managed to negotiate a modicum of freedom with permission granted by his superiors in 1960 for construction of a clinker-built hermitage in the woods, within a mile of the rest of the monastic community, where Merton would retire to write and receive guests away from the prying eyes of his confrères.

The Center for the Study of Democratic Institutions was committed to critiquing problems facing liberal democracies. Discussions focused on topics such as peace and war, democracy, dissent, ecology and the environment, the electoral process, immigration, international relations, law and order, the media,

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[129] I formed this opinion of Merton's writing life while researching in the Thomas Merton Center, and visiting the Abbey of Our Lady of Gethsemani, Bardstown, KY.

[130] Laughlin, "Letter to Thomas Merton" (August 11, 1961), in *Selected Letters*, ed. Cooper, 173-76.

[131] Merton, "Letter to Wilbur Ferry" (September 18, 1961), in *The Hidden Ground of Love*, ed. Shannon, 202-03.

race and ethnicity, and religion.[132] Laughlin had played a minor role with Hutchins in promoting cultural freedom during the mid-1950s. Throughout the 1960s, Laughlin donated to Hutchins's projects.[133] An echo of the pushback to civil liberties that had defined McCarthyism that Laughlin and Hutchins had confronted through their campaign for cultural freedom was detectable in Ferry's agenda to expose the "illusion" of survival as being detrimental to civil liberties.[134]

Wilbur Ferry's sympathies for the anti-test movement was concerned with the right of the citizen to dissent against government policy as a mark of civil liberties.[135] However, information that Ferry sent Merton reinforced Merton's conviction that there was a direct correlation between fallout shelters and nuclear strategy, which was a dubious association. Critics of home fallout shelters considered them a dangerous delusion, lulling people into a false sense of security.[136] The reason for this was because of the weak messaging by the government that had not honestly debated the kind of nation survivors would encounter following a nuclear strike. Ferry sent Merton a mimeograph of a paper by Gerard Piel on the "illusion" of the shelters that Merton enthusiastically mentioned in a letter to James Laughlin.[137] Dissenting scientific spokesmen considered that building private fallout shelters deflected from the fact that

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[132] James Real, "The Center for the Study of Democratic Institutions: Great Issues, Great Crises," *Change* 7, no.1 (February 1975): 38-43, 61-62.
[133] Greg Barnhisel, "James Laughlin, Robert Hutchins, and Cold War Cultural Freedom," *The Princeton University Library Chronicle* 75, no. 3 (Spring 2014): 402.
[134] James Ward, *Ferrytale: The Career of W.H. "Ping" Ferry* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2001), xxi.
[135] Barnhisel, "James Laughlin, Robert Hutchins, and Cold War Cultural Freedom," 404; Ian MacNiven, *"Literchoor is My Beat": A Life of James Laughlin, Publisher of New Directions* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2014), 356.
[136] Lawrence Freedman, *The Evolution of Nuclear Strategy*, 2nd ed. (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 1989), 251.
[137] Merton. "Letter to James Laughlin" (November 25, 1961), in *Selected Letters*, ed., Cooper,187.

nuclear weapons had reached the megaton range. A megaton is the energy released by one million tons of TNT. Survivors faced just as many threats from firestorms as from fallout despite government messaging, almost exclusively, focusing on nuclear fallout.[138] It was on account of weak government messaging that Piel, dismissed as an "illusion" Kennedy's public reassurances of home protection.[139] Piel argued that shelter provision was an illusion in a talk he gave in San Francisco in November 1961, published in the United States in the *Bulletin of Atomic Scientists* in February 1962.[140] Piel deduced that home shelters lulled citizens into a false sense of security.[141] The firestorm scenario was an irresistible weakness in the survival narrative for opponents of private shelters to draw to public attention because it highlighted that confidence in improvised shelters discounted blast and fire and projected a dangerous illusion for Americans that fallout was the only danger from a nuclear strike.[142] It was because Ferry was associated with a research centre that Merton trusted him.

Wilbur Ferry influenced the agenda for Merton's *Breakthrough to Peace* for New Directions publishing.[143] Broadly speaking, the anthology was a polemical manifesto calling for the abolishment of all war, not just nuclear war. Ferry sent Merton essays by Lewis Mumford, a philosopher of technology.[144] Merton used Mumford to reflect his commitment to Thomistic "*dignitas*" asserting that human beings have dignity by virtue of what they can become. Merton had concluded that the threat of weapons of mass destruction diminished

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[138] Rose *One Nation Underground*, 170.
[139] "Publisher of Scientific American Calls Civil Defense A Dangerous Illusion," *I.F. Stone's Weekly* (November 20, 1961), 2-3.
[140] Gerard Piel, "The Illusion of Civil Defense," *The Bulletin of Atomic Scientists* 17, no. 2 (February 1962): 2-8.
[141] Gerard Piel, "On the Feasibility of Peace," *Science*, February 23, 1962, 648-52.
[142] Rose *One Nation Underground*, 169.
[143] Merton to James Laughlin, November 27, 1961, Section A: Correspondence, TMC.
[144] Merton to Wilbur Ferry, November 18, 1961, Section A: Correspondence, TMC.

human potential and his writing was an attempt to reclaim human agency. Merton had wanted to title his anthology "The Morals of Extermination," but because of the bleakness of the wording he changed the working title to "The Human Way Out" inspired by Mumford's critique of the nuclear arms race presented in a lecture of the same title presented on 28 September 1961 to the University of California while Mumford was a visiting research professor of government affairs at Berkeley.[145] Mumford was highly critical of America's techno-culture that he perceived of as placing efficiency before morality.[146] Merton echoed Mumford's sentiments in his letter to Walter Stein at the University of Leeds in which he praised Mumford's critique of technology as one, "where our weapons are telling us what to do. We are guided and instructed [and] nurtured by our destructive machines."[147] Merton approved of Mumford in his letter to Walter Stein.[148] Merton reprinted an abridged version of a previously published essay by Stein in *Breakthrough to Peace*, which highlighted Merton's support for the abolishment of nuclear weapons.[149]

President Kennedy's liberal anti-communism reflected Arthur Schlesinger, Jr.'s "vital center," echoing Reinhold Niebuhr, whereby the only way free nations could unite to avert war was to build up their military strength as well as their economic, moral, and political strength. A strong foreign policy

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[145] Lewis Mumford, "Authoritarian and Democratic Technics," *Technology and Culture* 5, no.1 (Winter 1964): 1-8; Robert Casillo, "Lewis Mumford and the Organicist Concept in Social Thought," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 53, no.1 (January-March 1992): 91-116; Robert Jacobs, *The Dragon's Tail: Americans Face the Atomic Age* (Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 2010), 44, 51 & 52.

[146] Lewis Mumford, "The Human Way Out: an address given by Mr. Lewis Mumford at the University of California, Berkeley, 28 September 1961, Dwinelle Plaza." (London: Friends Peace Committee, 1961); Merton to Wilbur Ferry, November 18, 1961, Section A: Correspondence, TMC.

[147] Merton to Walter Stein, December 1961, Section A: Correspondence, TMC, typed and mimeographed as Merton, "Cold War Letter #18 to Walter Stein" (December 1961 or January 1962), in *Cold War Letters*, eds. Bochen and Shannon, 46.

[148] Merton, "Letter to Walter Stein," (December 1961 or January 1962), in *Witness to Freedom: Letters in Times of Crisis*, ed. William H. Shannon (New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 1994), 29.

[149] Walter Stein, "The Defense of the West," in *Breakthrough to Peace*, intro. Merton, 139-58.

would include not only military might, but would offer people a pragmatic chance to improve their lives. Liberals had to abandon utopianism and face the reality of a struggle without end.[150]

Correspondences between Merton, Ferry, and Laughlin focused on Merton editing the project while Laughlin underwrote costs of publishing the anthology. Merton wrote to Ferry, on 18 November 1961, revealing "our idea of a paperback of articles on peace."[151] Ferry insisted that their anthology should be utopian and offer an alternative to Niebuhrian realism. Merton admired Reinhold Niebuhr as "an American voice, with a clarity, a sobriety, an objectivity, a lack of despair that *should* be ours."[152] Ferry, in a letter to Laughlin on 14 November 1961, wrote: "[Reinhold] Niebuhr is a Realist. Your paperback will be a utopian one; i.e., the only kind of realism that is possible today."[153] Niebuhr rejected fatalistic views that destructiveness of atomic weapons meant an end to the possibility of redemption, the creation of the City of God.[154] Ferry, however, was critical of Niebuhrian realism because of its reticence to oppose anything the United States might do over the Soviet Union because its frame of reference was that international politics was essentially a struggle between aggressive totalitarianism and defensive democracy. The Berlin crisis in 1961 initiated Niebuhr's questioning of the moral dilemma of thermonuclear weapons.[155] Niebuhr's nuclear fears provoked him to consider that a war could occur without

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[150] Arthur Schlesinger Jr., *The Vital Center: The Politics of Freedom* (1949; repr., Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin, 1962), xxiii; Lawrence Freedman, *Kennedy's Wars: Berlin, Cuba, Laos, and Vietnam* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 15.

[151] Merton, "Letter to Wilbur Ferry" (November 18, 1961), in *The Hidden Ground of Love*, ed. Shannon, 203.

[152] Merton, *Turning Toward the World* (January 28, 1962), ed. Kramer, 91.

[153] Wilbur Ferry to James Laughlin, November 14, 1961, Section A: Correspondence, TMC.

[154] Reinhold Niebuhr, *The Irony of American History* (1952; repr., Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2008), 157.

[155] Campbell Craig, *Glimmer of a New Leviathan: Total War in the Realism of Niebuhr, Morgenthau, and Waltz* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003), 89.

anyone seeking to fulfil a messianic dream, and he thought, therefore, as well about how nuclear war could be avoided in the secular realm of international politics.[156] Ferry's negative perception of Niebuhrian realism influenced Merton's editing of their anthology as utopian peace making.

Merton's personal target through writing was his dissatisfaction with his own religious institution as he aspired to reclaim his relevance as a Catholic writer. It was for a question of idealism that Merton set himself at odds against Catholic just war theorists. Merton's reading of Stein had persuaded him that the wrongness of intention was the moral benchmark against nuclear deterrence. Merton set the agenda for his New Directions publishing project as "ammunition for the waging of peace," intended to preserve the "moral values of Christianity, the freedoms of democracy – and the world for man."[157] In this view, the existential threat of nuclear weapons challenged the dignity of human beings.

In summary, Merton espoused pacifism to promote Catholic discussion on nuclear risk despite the fact that debate on the moral legitimacy of the possession of nuclear weapons was not taking place in the mainstream, but only on the Catholic fringe. Merton was attracted by the moral logic proposed by Walter Stein. Merton assumed that it was possible to make a clear ethical distinction between the possession of nuclear weapons and the threat to use them. The moral issue that Walter Stein in England had grappled with was whether a credible deterrent could be maintained without an effective intention to resort to nuclear weapons should the risk of deterrence fail. Undoubtedly, to render deterrence credible it needed to appear that the determination to use nuclear weapons was beyond question. Merton, in his proposal for *Breakthrough to*

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[156] Ibid, 90.
[157] Jacket blurb for *Breakthrough to Peace*, intro. Thomas Merton.

Peace was planning to use Stein's moral logic as the basis to communicate the wrongness of intention so as to argue for the necessity for moral restraint on both possession and use of nuclear weapons that might precipitate an accidental nuclear war. However, the evolution of nuclear policy meant that it was impossible for a moralist to devise a general moral principle. Merton did not accept the paradox of nuclear deterrence that pre-supposed on the one hand that nuclear war was simultaneously possible and impossible, and on the other hand that the system was poised for war, so that the threat could remain credible. His techno-scientific pessimism concluded that a threat could, at the same time, be misunderstood by an enemy as the very stance that risked bringing about war.

Conclusion

This chapter highlighted Merton's commitment to the dignity of human life as a motivating factor for his engagement with nuclear pacifism. Merton's view was that nuclear weapons, as instruments of idolatry, violated the dignity of life. How did Merton reconcile his absolutist values and his professional responsibilities as a Catholic spokesman by seeking to engage the "apathy" of "Catholics in the U.S."[158] on the risks of nuclear war? Merton's correspondence with Protestant and Catholic pacifists demonstrated his ecumenical dialogues in action and his commitment to a communitarian personalist ethos. However, Merton did have a duty to inform his conscience by consulting a range of differences of opinion that conflicted with his own. He chose to believe his trusted correspondents: James Forest, James Laughlin and Wilbur Ferry. Each of these correspondents reinforced Merton's own sense of the rightness of his own opinions on the

[158] Merton, *Turning Toward the World* (November 25, 1961), ed. Kramer, 182-83.

abolition of nuclear weapons. Merton did not need to be a professional theologian to have been open to different opinions, but his engagement with the nuclear issue was cursive and speculative and he absorbed fragmentary information that he gleaned from his correspondents. Merton's commitment to the dignity of human life conditioned his absolutist response and his correspondents reinforced his beliefs.

The moral legitimacy of strategic doctrines designed to deter an adversary from the use of military force through the threat to use nuclear weapons against that adversary was a controversial question in Catholic moral philosophy. Merton was in search of a general moral theory to advocate for the abolishment of nuclear weapons. It was for this purpose in mind that Merton appropriated the Stein symposium group associated with the Catholic New Left in England. No plausible general moral theory for unilateral disarmament existed because of the technological and political reality that Merton chose to ignore.

The issue concerning the intention to possess nuclear weapons for national defence exposed tensions in Catholic thought between the integration of faith and reason. If intention to use nuclear weapons was realised in the action of actual use, there would be no question that both intention and action should be declared morally illegitimate. Merton clearly did not appreciate the primacy of policy over ethical considerations, whereby, deterrence policies were formulated with the explicit purpose of preventing the outbreak of nuclear war, which had a corresponding ethical value that Merton overlooked. The actions implementing these intentions were not the actual use of nuclear weapons but military and political steps which attempted to prevent nuclear conflict. No simple logical

argument could be made from a policy perspective for the illegitimacy of use to moral evaluation of intentions in deterrence.

A fundamental problem with Merton's attempt to be a pacifist persuader was that he did not relate nuclear deterrence to policy. In reality, deterrence was orientated towards the non-use of nuclear weapons. The factor that made the intention behind a deterrence policy distinguishable from an intention to employ nuclear force was a reasoned judgement for the policy in question could actually prevent use and the avoidance of war. One must be able to make a solid judgement that the policy in question could decrease the likelihood of nuclear war if the policy was to be regarded as a true deterrent policy. To go ahead with the implementation of a policy which would increase the likelihood of the use of these weapons was to intend this outcome. But to pursue policies which could be reasonably projected to make nuclear war less likely, even if these policies involved implicit or explicit threats, was to intend the avoidance of war. The moral judgement on the intention behind deterrence policies was therefore inseparable from an evaluation of the reasonably predictable outcomes of diverse policy choices. The real question for moral judgement was whether a concrete strategic option could actually make the world more secure from nuclear disaster or less so. There was no such thing as deterrence in the abstract because policy responded to the dynamic political events.

Merton's opposition to nuclear deterrence as based on his appropriation of the writings of Catholics of the New Left in England decidedly placed his opinion at odds with American religious commentators and professional theologians who rejected nuclear pacifism as being a legitimate Catholic position because the *magisterium* of the Catholic Church had not laid down that

possession of nuclear weapons was immoral and so was legitimate for national security. The opinion of the Stein symposium group was a radical position that was not accepted by the British Catholic hierarchy. Merton, however, embraced the work of the Stein symposium group in England as capable of integrating faith and reason within his sense of Catholic tradition by integrating both mystical and intellectual strands of thought in the service of imagining a cosmopolitan Catholic culture. The real question was whether concrete strategic options could make the world more secure from nuclear disaster. This, however, was a reality that Merton chose to avoid in his preference for an abstract moral principle, which was unattainable because of the dynamics of political action.

Chapter 3

Merton's Confidence in Moralities of Pacifism (31 December 1961 – 27 February 1962)

On 31 December 1961 Thomas Merton wrote to James Laughlin at New Directions publishing in New York to express his frustration with monastic censorship limiting his ability to respond to public debate in a timely manner.[159] Merton, in reality, was playing a double game by appealing to his correspondents to privately circulate his views while, at the same time, he was seeking support for the credibility of his views on pacifism from Dom James Fox, his superior. Trappist censors eventually agreed to allow Merton to publish due to intervention by Dom James who engineered a censor favourable to Merton's views as a way to smooth Merton's passage to publication.[160]

This chapter argues that Merton did exaggerate his pacifist position as being a legitimate Catholic position while Trappist censors did not regard Merton as having a religious mandate to speak on the morality of nuclear weapons. The stumbling block was the fact that Merton was writing about the prevention of nuclear war as an abstraction, removed from any political reality. He refused to

[159] Thomas Merton, "Letter to James Laughlin" (December 31, 1961), Thomas Merton and James Laughlin, *Selected Letters*, ed. David Cooper (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1997), 193.

[160] Fr. Bellarmine McQuiston, O.C.S.O., and Fr. Charles English, O.C.S.O., "Christian Ethics and Nuclear War." January 13, 1962, Series 35 # 05, Section A: Correspondence, Thomas Merton Center, Bellarmine University, Louisville, KY, afterwards TMC.

consider that deterrence was a means to reduce the risk of war. Merton, however, could not accept the paradox of nuclear deterrence that pre-supposed on the one hand that nuclear war was simultaneously possible and impossible, and on the other hand that the system was poised for war, so that the threat could be seen to be credible, thereby, reducing the risk of war. All deployment of nuclear weapons involved a conditional intention to use them, but as discussed in chapter one, Dorothy Day of the Catholic Worker movement considered nuclear deterrence as conditioned by the wrongness of intention by being incompatible with the fifth commandment of the Decalogue, "Thou shalt not kill."[161] Merton stated the Catholic position as one that opposed nuclear war.[162] He concluded that it was not self-evident that a calculated risk would reduce the risk of war. When Merton implied that a deterrence posture risked war he was on more shaky ground. Differences between Merton and Catholic moralists followed from their different philosophical moorings. Catholic moralists held to the Catholic qualified acceptance of deterrence, whereas, Merton held to the wrongness of intention that conditioned the paradox of deterrence. As discussed in chapter two, Merton was swayed by his reading of Walter Stein in challenging Roman Catholic qualified acceptance of nuclear deterrence as being fundamentally a question of justice. This chapter is orientated by tensions between values and actions as Merton negotiated the system of Trappist censorship to publication. The first section argues that Merton's criticism of deterrence was conditioned by a belief in intrinsic hostility that did not presume the non-use of nuclear

[161] Ex. 20:13 (Douay-Rheims); Dorothy Day, "We Go on Record: the CW Response to Hiroshima," *The Catholic Worker* (New York), September 1, 1945, 1; Patricia McNeal, *Harder than War: Catholic Peacemaking in Twentieth-Century America* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1992), 67-68.

[162] Merton, "Christian Ethics and Nuclear War," *The Catholic Worker* (New York) March 1, 1962, 2 & 7; *Passion for Peace*, ed. William Shannon (New York: Crossroad, 1995), 58-62.

weapons. The second section argues that Merton presented his pacifism within the *longue durée* of Catholic tradition despite the fact that he presented himself through correspondence as fighting his own "cold war" with religious authorities. Despite what Merton communicated, he was not without institutional support for his nuclear pacifist views. Unknown to Merton, it was Dom James, his superior, who personally intervened to defend Merton's freedom to publish. The unintended consequence of Merton's informal coalition with the Catholic Worker movement was that his writings were beginning to take on a symbolic value for peace activists seeking to establish the moral high ground for their actions. The third section argues that protracted censorship was having a psychological impact on Merton as he was beginning to reconsider whether it was prudent for him to be so directly involved with peace activists.

Merton only engaged within his own closed circle that reinforced his absolutist views against nuclear weapons as carrying an existential risk to humanity. Merton's attempt to discredit just war theorists as warmongers was a polemic that did not convince the Trappist censors of the validity of his opposition, but it did appeal to Merton's radical pacifist correspondents. Merton's growing hesitancy to be directly involved with the activism of radical pacifists was rooted in his sense of self-preservation as expressed through his prudence of action. The unintended consequence of Merton's coalition with the Catholic Worker movement was that his writings took on a symbolic value for peace activists, like James Forest, who conflated fallout shelter provision and the resumption of nuclear testing as warmongering.

Technology and Morality

The first section argues that Merton's criticism of nuclear deterrence was conditioned by a pacifist rhetoric of intrinsic hostility that did not presume the non-use of nuclear weapons. Morality does not inhere to any particular tactic, but is conditional on the tactic's efficacy in attaining another, morally normative goal. Merton privileged his commitment to the dignity of human life and so discounted the moral qualification regarding nuclear weapons as being similar to other technologies. The qualification first was to determine the normative orientation by asking what were the reason for the use of these technologies. The second task was to evaluate actual practices and policies against the normative benchmark. The problem was that Merton was seeking an absolute moral declaration against the possession and use of nuclear weapons that discounted the role these weapons played as potential instruments of diplomatic bargaining.

Kenneth Rose in 2001 presented Merton as being a purveyor of a "nuclear apocalyptic" polemic as an expression of a "populist attack on a political establishment that insisted on maintaining a dangerous, even insane, strategy."[163] However, this discounted the value of deterrence as a doctrine maintaining the non-use of nuclear weapons. Merton's real target was not the government, as Rose implied, but his fellow American Catholics who rhetorically reduced the Cold War to the "god-fearing versus godless."[164] Rose did present Merton as a critic of rhetorical simplicity through Merton's argument that U.S. incentives to wipe out Bolshevism was, "one of the apocalyptic

[163] Kenneth Rose, *One Nation Underground: The Fallout Shelter in American Culture* (New York: New York University Press, 2001), 76.
[164] Dianne Kirby, "Religion and the Cold War: An Introduction," in *Religion and the Cold War* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 1.

temptations of the twentieth-century."[165] Rose argued for Merton articulating a progressive liberal Catholic position with reference to his rejection of an *either*/*or* dichotomy that reconstituted the world into a titanic struggle between binary opposites: that of darkness, constituting America's enemies, and that of light, America itself. Merton condemned as scandalous an American Catholic mindset that reduced political discourse to rhetorical clichés: Soviet "H-bombs are from hell and ours are the instruments of divine justice," which implied that Americans, "have a divinely given mission to destroy this hellish monster and any steps we take to do so are innocent and even holy."[166] Rose made a definitive point by quoting from Merton's *Commonweal* article in 1962 to argue that the fallout shelter scare promoted a consumer culture of self-help that greased the politics of national security, nevertheless, Americans also engaged in heretofore overlooked forms of criticism of U.S. foreign policy during the late phase of atmospheric nuclear testing.[167] The accepted evaluation of Merton's writings during the year of the *Cold War Letters* has been succinctly expressed by Andrew Preston in 2012 who evaluated Merton as a "celebrated American Catholic intellectual," who "typified the shock and anger of religious liberals" by his pacifist opposition to new American nuclear tests in the spring of 1962 as a response to Soviet testing in 1961.[168] Merton was arguing that the nature of deterrence presumed an intrinsic hostility that would continue to require an arms race to maintain the deterrent, so the doctrine was inadequate at best, and dangerous at worst.

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[165] Merton, "Nuclear War and Christian Responsibility," *Commonweal* (New York), February 9, 1962, 510; Rose, *One Nation Underground*, 73.
[166] Merton, "Preface" (January 1963), in *Cold War Letters*, eds. Christine Bochen and William Shannon (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2006), 5.
[167] Rose, *One Nation Underground*, 76.
[168] Andrew Preston, *Sword of the Spirit, Shield of Faith: Religion in American War and Diplomacy* (New York, NY: Knopf, 2012), 514.

The circumstance in which Merton set himself against Catholic moralists was the context of a commission from *Commonweal* magazine inviting Merton to write an opinion piece for their Christmas 1961 issue. The editorial position of *Commonweal* took the position that unilaterally abandoning the nuclear deterrent posed a risk to national security.[169] The editors at *Commonweal* commissioned Merton because his recent writings aligned with the radical pacifist position calling for the abolishment of nuclear weapons and his writings for the *Catholic Worker* from October to November 1961 had brought him to their attention as one of the few members of the Catholic clergy prepared to go against the grain of Catholic acceptance of nuclear deterrence.[170]

The *Commonwea*l magazine, established in 1924, was the oldest independent Roman Catholic journal of opinion in the United States. The magazine provided a forum for civil, reasoned debate on the interaction of faith with contemporary politics and culture. Lucid, fearless, but never obscure, *Commonweal* magazine was a singular and major achievement of the American Catholic laity before the Second Vatican Council. The magazine's genuine openness to the non-Catholic world and its progressive response to social problems eventually gave rise to the term "Commonweal Catholic" as a covert accusation of radicalism and unorthodoxy. *Commonweal* magazine was a "non-movement movement in American Catholicism" that worked to educate Catholics in their faith and its application to the social and political problems of the modern world.[171]

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[169] Lawrence McAndrews, "Parallel Paths: Kennedy, the Church, and Nuclear War," *American Catholic Studies* 119, no. 1 (2008): 6.

[170] Fellowship of Reconciliation, *Two Articles by Thomas Merton, The Root of War & Red or Dead: The Anatomy of a Cliché* (Nyack, New York: Fellowship publications, 1962).

[171] Rodger Van Allen, *The Commonweal and American Catholicism: The Magazine, The Movement, The Meaning* (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1974), 189.

Merton's perception that deterrence was a doctrine that was producing moral deformation fitted his perception of a diminishing of the inviolability of human life within technocratic systems. He called deterrence "a policy of genocide" as based on a system of threats and counter-threats.[172] It is perhaps worth considering that Merton's opinion was shaped by Thomistic "*dignitas*" as a means to express the value of the human person as an autonomous subject rather than as a utilitarian object operating within a system of threats and counter-threats that may have been intended by governments to guarantee security, but diminished the quality of the common good. Merton used stark language that presumed the nature of nuclear deterrence as an intrinsic hostility that required a dangerous arms race to maintain the credibility of the deterrent that risked war. Note the similarity to Lewis Mumford in *Breakthrough to Peace*, which opens: "Since 1945, the American government has devoted the better part of our national energies to preparations for wholesale human extermination."[173] Mumford, here, reduces nuclear deterrence that was intended to maintain the international peace to a series of threats and counter-threats pivoting on his hard technological determinist position that presumed an intrinsic hostility that did not assume the non-use of nuclear weapons. Mumford writes: "When we abandoned the basic moral restraints against random killing and mass extermination we enlarged the destructive capabilities of our nuclear weapons."[174] Merton's reading of Mumford influenced Merton's opposition to deterrence as moral deformation. In Merton's opinion it was the primary moral duty of the Catholic Church to preserve and defend life, but the irony was that Merton discounted

[172] Merton, "Nuclear War and Christian Responsibility," in *Passion for Peace*, ed. Shannon, 39.
[173] Lewis Mumford, "The Morals of Extermination," in *Breakthrough to Peace: Twelve Views on the Threat of Thermonuclear Extermination*, intro. Thomas Merton (New York: New Directions, 1962), 15.
[174] Ibid, 21.

deterrence as a doctrine that was intended to maintain the peace and so prevent any future war.

Merton's moral absolutism derived from the English Catholic New Left.[175] It was this perspective that conditioned Merton's criticism of American Catholics who "now seem to accept nuclear war as reasonable is universal scandal."[176] This "scandal" for Merton was that American Catholics believed that Christianity could be defended from communist ideology by the power of nuclear weapons. Merton believed nuclear war was the single greatest threat facing humanity; American Catholic commentators considered that nuclear war was winnable or at least survivable. Donald Wolf, S.J., an American Catholic commentator writing in *America* magazine proposed that a government-sponsored interfaith committee would prepare an information booklet for every clergyman in the United States to guide the activities of religious in the event of an atomic attack. "Being forearmed," Wolf concluded, "the clergy would help to save both lives and souls."[177] What was striking about Wolf's proposal was that he perceived nuclear weapons in terms of conventional warfare and that there was an unwillingness on the part of Catholic commentators to challenge the rhetoric of the fallout shelter scare that nuclear war was at least survivable. Wolf accepted the world as it was, whereas, Merton was seeking to transform the world from a personalist perspective, influenced by Jacques Maritain, and that reflected his monastic *ascesis*, the influence of the Catholic Worker movement,

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[175] Merton to Etta Gullick, December 22, 1961, Section A: Correspondence, Thomas Merton Center, Bellarmine University, Louisville, KY, afterwards TMC, typed and mimeographed as Merton, "Cold War Letter #14 to Etta Gullick" (December 22, 1961), in *Cold War Letters*, eds. Bochen and Shannon, 38.

[176] Merton, "Nuclear War and Christian Responsibility," in *Passion for Peace*, ed. Shannon, 40.

[177] Donald Wolf, "The Clergy in an Atomic Attack," *America* (New York), November 4, 1961, 152-154.

and the neo-Thomist Catholic intellectuals of the English New Left on the formation of his social conscience.

Merton accepted the *Commonweal* commission as an opportunity to present nuclear pacifism as being a legitimate Catholic moral alternative to just war in the nuclear era and so contribute to a disarmament narrative. Contrary to Merton's opinion, national leaders did not have the prerogative to subordinate the goal of protecting those under their authority against foreign threats to other goals if doing so would threaten national survival. To do so would be to abdicate their most basic leadership responsibilities of protecting national survival in a precarious international system.

Technology presented a new conceptual reality with the potential to challenge time-related religious activities. Merton did not have sustained time to work on a carefully crafted intellectual proposition as he wrote rapidly in bursts within his hectic community life.[178] Merton mentioned his lack of engagement with media to Czesław Miłosz the Polish-Lithuanian poet, whom Merton began corresponding with after he first read *The Captive Mind* in 1958.[179] Merton commented to Miłosz: "I have never seen TV, that is never watched it."[180] Merton perceived television as a cultural medium feeding and reinforcing America's consumerist solipsism and as posing an existential risk to spiritual well-being. The major part of Merton's vocational lifestyle was punctuated by a regular cycle of work and prayer that had retained its basic structure since St. Benedict founded Western monasticism in the sixth century. Merton was aware of his limitations. He wrote to Laughlin: "We are all wound up in lies and

[178] Merton, "The Daily Life of a Cistercian Monk in Our Time," in *The Waters of Siloe* (1949; repr., London: Sheldon Press, 1976), x-xi.
[179] Czesław Miłosz, *The Captive Mind.* (1953; repr., London: Penguin Classics, 2001).
[180] Merton, "Letter Czesław Miłosz" (March 28, 1961), *Echoing Silence: Thomas Merton on the Vocation of Writing*, ed. Robert Inchausti (Boston, MA: New Seeds, 2007), 182-83.

illusions and as soon as we begin to think or talk, the machinery of falsity operates automatically."[181] Here, Merton articulates his awareness of the ethical implication he faced as a writer who worked in the craft of the written word as a technology that had power to condition and shape human consciousness.

Merton's self-insight communicated through correspondence, but it fell short when he confronted the complexity of political problems. This is reflected in a letter from Merton to Miłosz dated 28 March 1962 in which Merton wrote: "I am going to take a vacation from writing and do a lot of reading and thinking if I can. It is really vital that I get more into the center of the real problems. I mean the real ones."[182] The context of this comment was Merton reflecting to Miłosz that he was simultaneously working on drafting his essay for *Commonweal* magazine, *Breakthrough to Peace*, and a book manuscript "Peace in the Post-Christian Era" that he was drafting for Macmillan publishers in New York.[183] Merton's pattern of writing and editing was improvised with an amount of duplication to sustain the barrage of articles he was working on.

Merton had limited exposure to information beyond his correspondence circle and this reinforced his techno-scientific pessimism that highlighted for him the erosion of Thomistic "*dignitas*" or the autonomy of the person. The federal government's message during the shelter debate focused on the positive narrative of personal and national survival, but downplayed the risks. Wilbur Ferry had sent Merton a mimeograph of a paper by Gerard Piel, publisher of *Scientific*

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[181] Merton, "Letter to James Laughlin" (August 18, 1961), in *Selected Letters*, ed. Cooper, 177.
[182] Merton, "Letter Czesław Miłosz" (March 28, 1961), in *Echoing Silence*, ed. Inchausti, 183-84.
[183] Merton, "Peace: a Religious Responsibility," in *Breakthrough to* Peace, into. Merton, 88-116.

American, on the "illusion" of fallout shelters as the means for survival.[184] Previously, in chapter two, this example was discussed as Piel argued that home shelters lulled American citizens into a false sense of security because the real threat from a Soviet strike was from the primary effects of firestorms rather than the secondary effects of contamination from atmospheric nuclear fallout.[185] In addition, James Laughlin wrote to Merton in December 1961 informing him of a statement in the *New York Times*, signed and paid for by several hundred scientists and professors at different New York colleges and institutions, protesting against shelter building.[186] Merton's cloistered remove caused him to perceive the crisis of the fallout shelter scare as continuing beyond the period at which it had ended in the national media.[187] Merton viewed the shelter as a metaphor to illustrate the erosion of human value that aligned with his techno-scientific pessimism.

Merton was motivated to offer his opinion in *Commonweal* magazine as a Catholic institutional corrective through his belief in the validity of the Stein symposium group's criticism of the inadequacy of the just war teaching to constrain the use of nuclear weapons.[188] Merton, loosely drawing upon Walter Stein, observed to his monastic novices that it was "only on paper" that "limited nuclear war and tactical nuclear weapons are within the limits of the ethical just war theory."[189] The Roman Catholic Church had a qualified acceptance of deterrence as a means to achieve an eventual route to disarmament in the

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[184] Merton, "Letter to James Laughlin" (November 25, 1961), in *Selected Letters*, ed. Cooper, 187.
[185] Gerard Piel, "The Illusion of Civil Defense," *The Bulletin of Atomic Scientists* 17, no. 2 (February 1962): 7.
[186] James Laughlin to Thomas Merton, December 21, 1961, Section A: Correspondence, TMC.
[187] Merton, "Introduction," *Breakthrough to Peace*, 8.
[188] Robert Markus, "Conscience and Deterrence," in *Nuclear Weapons and Christian Conscience*, ed. Walter Stein (London: Merlin Press, 1961), 65-87.
[189] Merton, "Cassian on Prayer," novitiate seminar, July 26, 1962: CD 002-Tr-3, remarks on nuclear testing. Sub-section F.5: Audio recordings, TMC.

unforeseen future. Merton's reasoning was a special pleading on his own behalf as a religious authority for clear moral guidelines opposing both possession and use of nuclear weapons. Merton's desire to discredit Catholic moralists for colluding with his perception of state militarism moved him to the limit of Catholic teaching and the civil law.

Merton's suspicion of just war theorists adjusting their moral judgements to fit political logic was based on his pre-supposition about nuclear weapons as primarily being offensive in nature that professional moral theologians did not make. This can be gauged by Merton's reaction to one such professional Catholic moralist, Fr. Robert P. Mohan, a priest of the Sulpician Order and moral philosopher at the Catholic University of America in Washington, D.C., was reported as holding the view that the U.S. would be justified in "pre-emptive" military actions, aimed at countering an "immediate threat" of aggression by an enemy. Mohan was reported as saying: *"*As one who considers capitulation to Communism equivalent to extinction, I would prefer smashed buildings and smashed skulls as preferable to a Soviet world without God and freedom."[190] Mohan distinguished between a "pre-emptive" military action and a "preventive war," which he defined as "unjustified aggressive action designed to remove a remote threat."[191] This underscores that Mohan held to the Catholic position of a qualified acceptance of nuclear deterrence for national defence and was far less bellicose than Merton had chosen to represent him through his correspondence with Wilbur Ferry as follows:

> As far as I can see this is the more or less accepted view of many theologians and perhaps of the majority in the U.S. It is stated with much more subtlety and humanity by John Courtney Murray, and here is one Jesuit, Fr. John Ford, who takes exception to it and is more over

[190] Editors, "Can we defend ourselves?" *The Criterion* (Indianapolis), July 28, 1961, 1.
[191] Ibid.

> our way. But this man Fr. Mohan is a crusader and franker expression of all that lies behind the suave surface of Murray's argument.[192]

Merton, influenced by Lewis Mumford's hard technological determinism, took Catholic bellicose rhetoric at face value. "It is pure sophistry," Merton wrote, "to claim that physical annihilation in nuclear war as a 'lesser evil'."[193] It was precisely because nuclear weapons constituted a new species of warfare that a moral crusade involving nuclear weapons could not be morally justified, in Merton's opinion.[194] Mohan had originally made his comments at the start of the shelter scare as a domestic response to the Berlin crisis in 1961. There was a delay between the time Mohan had originally made his comments and the time when Merton received the report of these comments from Ferry and this delay is important for understanding Merton's perception of the shelter scare as a continuous crisis, but the event had passed. Merton's unwillingness to accept the paradox of nuclear deterrence led him to draw conclusions about Mohan as being a bellicose Catholic spokesman, which was not the case, in this instance, and it was Merton's unwillingness to accept the paradox of nuclear deterrence that led him to conclude that nuclear preparedness meant an intention to go to war rather than to prevent a war. The fact that Merton took this bellicosity at face value highlighted his estrangement from the national life he claimed to be addressing.

Merton was not a professional moralist and his justification for nuclear pacifism was based on his commitment to the dignity of human life. Merton wrote: "The first duty of the Christian is to help clarify thought on this point by

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[192] Merton to Wilbur Ferry, January 30, 1962, Section A: Correspondence, TMC, typed and mimeographed as Merton, "Cold War Letter # 26 to Wilbur Ferry" (January 30, 1962), in *Cold War Letters*, eds. Bochen and Shannon, 60.

[193] Merton, "Nuclear War and Christian Responsibility," in *Passion for Peace*, ed. Shannon, 41.

[194] Merton, *Peace in the Post-Christian Era*, ed. Patricia Burton (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2006), 77, Merton cites John Courtney Murray, *We Hold These Truths: Catholic Reflections on the American Proposition* (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1960), 264.

taking the stand that all-out nuclear; bacterial or chemical warfare is unacceptable as a practical solution to international problems because it would mean the destruction of the world." [195] The moral issue for Merton was the nature of nuclear deterrence as orientated by an implied hostility while discounting the value of nuclear deterrence as orientated by the non-use of nuclear weapons and was a mode of technology management. Using implied hostility as a moral benchmark had problems for practical application. The attitudes of the warrior-technicians who directed and used the weapons systems may have been detached and even indifferent in their attitudes, perhaps even a banal sort of evil, but this was different from the lust for revenge and the craving for power that troubled St. Augustine and St. Thomas Aquinas.[196] Merton was suspicious of just war theorists because he was evaluating their actions on his pre-supposition that they were bellicose and nationalistic and were not concerned with the universalism of justice. Merton perceived threats to peace as being from warmongers from within the Catholic Church, itself. The Holy See did not condemn nuclear deterrence as immoral despite Merton's desire for it to do so. Merton wrote: "pronouncements of the Holy See all point" to "the total abolition of war" as "the only ultimate solution."[197] Merton's tendency to moralise oversimplified and obscured meaning and falsified claims. Merton wrote: "the furious speed with which our technological world is plunging towards disaster is evident that no one is any longer fully in control – and this includes the political leaders."[198] The connection between the bomb as an historical-empirical reality and deterrence as

[195] Merton, "Nuclear War and Christian Responsibility," in *Passion for Peace*, ed. Shannon, 44.
[196] Ibid, 33-34.
[197] Courtney Murray, *We Hold These Truths*, 44.
[198] Merton, "Nuclear War and Christian Responsibility," in *Passion for Peace*, ed. Shannon, 42.

a strategy to manage it was not self-evident to Merton.[199] Catholic moralists accommodated designing, building, maintaining, and testing nuclear weapons. Technology management is not the usual mode of conceiving nuclear morality. A far more common approach is to conceive of one or more of the management *tactics* such as disarmament, arms control, or deterrence as inherently moral. Merton's criticism of Mohan's opinion had much to do with Merton's own techno-scientific pessimism because he perceived moralists as mandarins whose technocratic language was weakening the ethics of human value and was helping to shift American consciousness to acceptance of even greater nuclear risk.

Merton was aware that the invocation of a moral dimension to nuclear weapons policy had an intrinsic populist effect: it is to say that this was a matter of concern not simply to those who exercise direct responsibility, but to the broader public interest in the nation's moral conduct. Merton informally consulted Msgr. John Tracy Ellis for advice on professional moral theology. It was through Ellis that Merton made contact with Jesuit theologian Fr. John C. Ford, S.J., who was a leading authority on Catholic just war teaching. It had been Ellis who recommended Ford to Merton as a sympathetic reviewer because Ford had defended the inviolability of human life through his writings.[200] As discussed in chapter two, Dorothy Day of the Catholic Worker movement drew inspiration from Gandhi's *satyagraha* to draw out the notion of defensive civil disobedience against laws that deformed the moral integrity of the person. Merton had begun to consider advocating for American Catholic defensive civil disobedience in relation to the war economy. Civil resistance had been fermenting in Merton's mind since July 1961 when he noted in his journal: "Mil[itary] service is only a

[199] Merton to Msgr. John Tracy Ellis, December 7, 1961, Section A: Correspondence, TMC.
[200] John C Ford, "The Morality of Obliteration-effect Bombing," *Theological Studies* 5, no. 3 (September 1944): 261-309.

symptom of a deeper evil. All who support the state in other ways besides this are equally guilty (I mean support a state organizing for war.)."[201] This validated for him James Forest's evaluation of "civil defense" as a national conspiracy that promoted the "illusion" that nuclear war was survivable and even winnable.[202] Merton was arguing that although no person wanted a nuclear war, yet millions conspired to make it possible through their votes and taxes. There were millions of others in the nuclear state who collaborated in preparing for war and from which the majority of citizens were excluded, except as potential future victims.[203] His opinion justified the tactics of civil disobedience against nuclear preparedness used by the Catholic Worker movement. Merton wrote:

> . . .if you go to work for Boeing with the impression that you will not have to build bombers, or for Chrysler missiles with a mental reservation that you won't manufacture anything with a warhead, you remain partly responsible for nuclear war which you have helped to prepare, even though you may have had good intentions and desired nothing but to make an "honest living."[204]

For Merton, the conclusion seems inescapable: the nuclear deterrent is not acceptable to Christian consciences and cannot in the foreseeable future be transformed into an acceptable form of deterrence. The deterrent is a public act, which comes to be in and through many individual choices which propose that act, accept proposals to adopt it, participate in it, or in some other way support it. Every citizen's fundamental responsibility is: not to choose or do anything which itself adopts, participates in, or supports that public act or any of the subordinate acts by which it is sustained. Because the public act includes, essentially, a proposal no one should ever adopt, one must never accept any invitation to

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[201] Merton, *Turning Toward the World* (July 9, 1961), ed. Kramer, 141.
[202] Jim Forest, *Writing Straight With Crooked Lines: A Memoir* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2020), 109.
[203] Merton, "Peace: A Religious Responsibility," in *Breakthrough to Peace*, intro. Merton, 88-117.
[204] Merton, "Christian Ethics and Nuclear War," in *Passion for Peace*, ed. Shannon, 62.

support the deterrent or to help, however reluctantly, to bring about its continuance.

Fr. John C. Ford, expressed his reservations for Merton recommending to American Catholics that they should consider civil resistance against the war economy, as Merton wrote: "it must be possible for every free man to refuse his consent and deny his cooperation to this greatest of crises."[205] Merton based his opinion on his assumption that the continuing existence of nuclear weapons rendered any future war unjust. Ford informed Merton his opinion did not represent the teaching of the Roman Catholic Church. Ford wrote: "Appearing over your signature especially, they might conclude that this was the Catholic doctrine, when actually it represents a Catholic opinion."[206] Ford placed emphasis on this point by underlining his words in response to Merton. In essence, Merton based his opinion on the choice to act, meaning the intention and the willingness, which was regulated by the Christian moral life. In the Ten Commandments, and in the words of Jesus Christ in the New Testament, the Church has always found confirmation of the rational principle that what it is wrong to do it is wrong to intend: what makes one worthy or unworthy is what proceeds from one's heart; voluntary anger and lust, even without issuing in deeds, are morally evil.[207] The point that Merton was making was that Christians, whether reaching their own verdict, before any eventual verdict of the Church against the nuclear deterrent, or following that verdict, had a duty to consider how their choices would bear on their nation's common good. But they should do so knowing that they could make no choice which participated in or itself

[205] Merton, "Nuclear War and Christian Responsibility," in *Passion for Peace*, ed., Shannon, 46.
[206] Fr. John C. Ford, S.J. to Thomas Merton, December 18, 1961. Section A: Correspondence, TMC.
[207] Ex. 20:17; Deut. 5:21; Matt. 5:22, 15:17; Mark 7:18-23, 18 (Douay-Rheims).

supported a policy which, though indispensable for securing that common good against terrible disruption and damage by foreign, unjust, and anti-Christian forces, was excluded from Christian life because of a murderous intention. Ford, however, perceived the danger of Merton renouncing the deterrent as a dangerous proposition that would destabilise the balance of terror and discredit the loyalty of American Catholics. Merton held to his absolutist views. However, he hesitated as to how best to present views to his readership as he weighed the circumstances to determine the correct action.

Fr. John C. Ford's definitive response did nothing to dissuade Merton from his unwillingness to accept the paradox of nuclear deterrence and to criticise just war theorists as warmongers who were liable to find loopholes to fit secular politics and military interests. This is clearly evident in Merton's response to Ford, which was as follows: "Father, my heart is very sick with the feeling that we don't give the impression of caring at all what happens to man, the image of God."[208] Merton confessed his emotion in his private journal. Merton wrote: "[Ford] says that if I urge Catholics not to work in armament plants etc., I am urging them to be 'more Catholic than the Pope and bishops.'"[209] How this was to be practically achieved was never articulated by Merton. Again, the idea returns to Thomistic "*dignitas*" asserting that human beings have dignity by virtue of what they can become not because of the simple fact that they are persons. The issue for Merton was that the willingness to do a great wrong if certain conditions were fulfilled was a seriously wrongful choice,

[208] Merton to Fr. John C. Ford, S.J., January 1962, Section A: Correspondence, TMC, typed and mimeographed as Merton, "Cold War Letter # 23 Fr. John C. Ford, S.J." (January 1962), in *Cold War Letters*, eds., Bochen and Shannon, 53-54.
[209] Merton, *Turning Toward the World* (December 22, 1961), ed. Kramer, 186-87.

even if one might, when the conditions were fulfilled, repent of one's choice and choose not to carry it out.

In summary, Merton's perception of politics was framed through his monastic *ascesis*. His idea of personal conversion of life was his attempt to take seriously the vocation of active citizenship as a commitment to the Gospel ethics of nonviolence and relationship repair, and so he perceived the secular world from the perspective of his monastic *ascesis* as a basis for personal conversion as a ground for political transformation. Merton's message was to advocate for the imaginative integration of a particular Christian perspective on personal conversion as appropriate to specific vocations in citizenship. This response would, of course, differ greatly from someone exercising a vocation in the security establishment, as opposed to a homemaker or business leader. But in each vocation, to greater and lesser levels of explicitness, the values upholding the norm of nuclear non-use might be manifested. This allowed for a vocation of active citizenship. Most people, however, did not lead daily lives that gave them any influence over nuclear decision-making.

Merton and his Censors

This section argues that Merton situated his pacifism within the *longue durée* of Catholicism despite the fact that he represented himself through correspondence as fighting his own "cold war" with religious authorities. Despite what Merton communicated, he was not without institutional support for his nuclear pacifist views. Unknown to Merton, it was Dom James, his superior, who personally intervened to defend Merton's freedom to publish.

The Trappist censors took a similar perspective to Fr. John C. Ford, S.J., on the danger Merton's arguments posed to the credibility of Catholicism that maintained the qualified acceptance of nuclear deterrence and did not advocate a pacifism, that Merton was advocating, as being *the* authentic Catholic protest within the nuclear state. Ford's private advice to Merton was also reinforced by Trappist censors who further advised Merton that the Holy See had not sanctioned conscientious objection for Catholics.[210] Unknown to Merton, it was Dom James, his immediate religious superior, who personally intervened to defend Merton's freedom to publish his opinion. The issue for Trappist censors was that they regarded Merton's pacifist writings as beyond the concerns of a monk by straying into politics and "a very 'hot' controversy."[211] Merton, however, had accepted an invitation from *Commonweal* without prior approval from his religious superiors. Any writing that Merton sought for publication required institutional approval.[212] It was one thing for Merton to publish in the *Catholic Worker* newspaper that had a receptive readership, but it was quite another matter to publish for *Commonweal* magazine that reached a diverse national readership. The monastic censors, responsible for issuing publishing permission were duty-bound to uphold the reputation of American Trappists and were justifiably concerned that Merton's opinions could tarnish Trappist reputations by straying into matters of politics.[213] Merton, for his part, perceived Trappist censors as impermeable to the moral issue.[214] The issue for Merton was

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[210] Fr. Bellarmine McQuiston, O.C.S.O., and Fr. Paul Bourne, O.C.S.O., "Peace: Christian Duties and Perspectives," January 9, 1962, Series 110 # 04, Section A: Correspondence, TMC.
[211] Ibid.
[212] Miscellaneous Correspondence Concerning Censorship, Series. 88, Section A: Correspondence, TMC.
[213] Merton, "Peace: Christian Duties and Perspectives," January 9, 1962, Series 110 # 04, Section A: Correspondence, TMC.
[214] Merton, "Letter to Jim Forest" (January 5, 1962), Jim Forest, *Living with Wisdom: A Life of Thomas Merton*, (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1991), 140, 223 n. 2, 35; *The Hidden Ground of Love:*

one of Catholic collusion with the state against citizens rather than the reality of the situation for the Trappist censors, which was Merton's failure to understand the purpose of nuclear deterrence and the inappropriateness of the topic for a cloistered monk to write about and to publish on from a Trappist perspective.

Dom James was an institutional steward, rather than an institutional gatekeeper, and he was concerned about Merton and valued his pacifist writings. However, Dom James had to balance the interests of the Trappist community with Merton's diverse interests. Merton, as an advocate of nonviolence in the tradition of early Christianity, was proposing that the Roman Catholic Church should advocate for the preservation of rights by nonviolent means and without the tacit acceptance of the need for peace to be defended through recourse to nuclear weapons. Dom James tried to accommodate the passage of Merton's writings through the censorship process. In December 1961, Dom James wrote to the Master Censor, Fr. Paul Bourne at Holy Cross Abbey in Conyers, Georgia, daughter-house of the Abbey of Gethsemani in Kentucky. Dom James informed Bourne that the Trappist censor had rejected Merton's draft for *Commonweal* magazine on the grounds that Merton's cloistered remove did not qualify him to offer an opinion on nuclear weapons, and anyway, what could a monk offer to inform a debate on nuclear war.[215] This rejection ended Merton's efforts to submit the article to the editors of *Commonweal* for their Christmas 1961 issue as he had planned for in October 1961. Merton had an ability to persuade others of the credibility of his viewpoint within the institution. Merton introduced Dom James to Jerome D. Frank, Professor of Psychiatry at Johns Hopkins University

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The Letters of Thomas Merton on Religious Experience and Social Concerns, ed. William H. Shannon (New York: Farrar, Straus, & Giroux, 1985), 261.

[215] Dom James Fox, O.C.S.O. to Fr. Paul Bourne, O.C.S.O., December 16, 1961, Section A: Correspondence, TMC.

while Frank was visiting Merton at the abbey in his capacity as a contributor to Merton's *Breakthrough to Peace.*[216] Merton, as novice master, believed in the pedagogical benefits of monks learning to become attuned to social and political events beyond the cloister walls as part of the ongoing conversion of life that was the primary focus of the vocational life of a monk. It was for this reason that Merton invited Frank to speak to the monastic community on nuclear war. Dom James, through correspondence, gave his impression of Frank's presentation to Bourne, as follows:

> [Jerome D. Frank] spoke of the A.B.C. [Atomic, Biological and Chemical] warfare. If we are going to pray for peace intensely, we should realize what tremendous dangers threaten peace—and not only the peace of the world, but the very survival of the human race—not only this generation, but future generations—even for hundreds of years.[217]

This fitted Merton's commitment to the dignity of human life that manifested itself as an absolutist position against all war, not just nuclear war, as he imagined "biological" and "chemical" warfare as being an intermediate form of warfare between conventional and "atomic" warfare. Frank contributed to influencing the abbot's approach to the veracity of Merton's opinions, but it was Merton who had engineered the event. Dom James reminded the Abbot General that Merton carried significant influence across the spectrum of Catholic opinion and, as a consequence, Dom James advised Dom Gabriel that Merton should be given latitude to publish as his conscience demanded and as monastic censorship rules permitted.[218] Dom James worked behind the scenes to persuade the Abbot General, Dom Gabriel Sortais, that some censors were going beyond the rules of

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[216] Jerome Frank, "Breaking the Thought Barrier: Psychological Challenges of the Nuclear Age," in *Breakthrough to Peace*, intro. Merton, 206-49.
[217] Dom James Fox, O.C.S.O. to Fr. Paul Bourne, O.C.S.O., December 16, 1961, Section A: Correspondence, TMC.
[218] Dom James Fox, O.C.S.O. to Dom Gabriel Sortais, O.C.S.O., January 9, 1962, Section A: Correspondence, TMC.

censorship because the rules that circumscribed permissions to publish only applied to doctrinal or moral errors and Merton was merely expressing his opinion, which was not a legitimate reason for withholding permission for him to publish.[219] This differed from the views of Fr. John C. Ford and Trappist censors who based their concerns on the lack of rigour of Merton's argument meaning that his opinion could be misconstrued by readers as being a legitimate Catholic position supporting unilateral disarmament, which was not the position of the Catholic Church that did tolerate a qualified acceptance of nuclear deterrence.

Dom James tactfully negotiated with the censors how Merton's wishes could be accommodated in order to facilitate his publication. It was Dom James who played a significant part behind the scenes in steering Merton's writings through censorship, largely unknown to Merton who maintained a suspicion of his superior. Dom James wrote to Fr. Paul Bourne on Merton's behalf because Merton needed Bourne's approval before he received permission to publish on behalf of the Trappist Order and the Roman Catholic Church. Dom James defended Merton to Bourne as being a spokesman for a particular "school of Catholic thought" [220] manifested by Christian pacifism. Dom James persuaded Bourne to nominate Fr. Charles English, who had formerly been a managing editor of the *Catholic Worker* newspaper, to act as Merton's censor to facilitate a smoother passage of Merton's essays to publication.[221] Merton affirmed Catholic Worker pacifism, which ultimately had Christian anarchist roots manifested as suspicion of state authority, but the character of Merton's pacifism that called for

[219] Dom James Fox, O.C.S.O. to Dom. Gabriel Sortais, O.C.S.O., February 14, 1962, Section A: Correspondence, TMC; Fr. Paul Bourne, O.C.S.O. to Dom James Fox, O.C.S.O., February 18, 1962, Section A. Correspondence, TMC.

[220] Dom James Fox, O.C.S.O. to Fr. Paul Bourne, O.C.S.O., December 16, 1961, Section A: Correspondence, TMC.

[221] Dorothy Day, "On Pilgrimage: The Story of Jack English's First Mass," *The Catholic Worker* (New York), March 1, 1959, 1, 7 & 8.

the abolishment of war, not just nuclear war, was not familiar to Trappist censors who were suspicious of Merton's line of argument because neither the hierarchy nor the theologians had advocated this position as a legitimate position for Catholics to espouse.[222] Merton's unwillingness to accept the paradox of nuclear deterrence led him to conclude that the morality of nuclear preparedness was an issue that related to Thomistic "*dignitas*" and communitarian personalism that had implications for the whole of humanity as a manifestation of God's creation, whereas, for the Trappist censors secular politics and religion were separate states of existence. These fundamental differences of interpretation that pitted emotion against reason did result in protracted delays in censorship and this was a reason why Dom James had enlisted Fr. Charles to break the deadlock.

Merton embarked on affirmative action of his own. He set out to mimeograph his letters, in *samizdat* fashion, and circulate these within his correspondence circle. Merton's hope was that his correspondents could further circulate his letters within their own networks. The obvious danger of this was that Merton could have no control over how his words could be used by others for their own political ends. Laughlin, however, was unwilling to support Merton in breaking the censorship rules of his religious institution, but Merton, in a letter to Laughlin on 31 December 1961, stressed that mimeograph copies did not strictly constitute publication. Merton assured Laughlin that he would get his writings re-censored while privately circulating his essays. "As for private circulation," Merton wrote, ". . .that is none of the censor's business [. . .] Circulation of a couple of hundred mimeographed copies is not publication."[223]

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[222] Fr. Bellarmine McQuiston, O.C.S.O., and Fr. Paul Bourne, O.C.S.O., "Peace: Christian Duties and Perspectives," January 9, 1962, Series 110 # 04, Section A: Correspondence, TMC.
[223] Merton, "Letter to James Laughlin" (December 31, 1961), in *Selected Letters*, ed. Cooper, 193-94.

Yet, there were limits to just how far Merton was prepared to engage in his improvised dissent. He was prepared to break off his clandestine activities if the Abbot General personally declared that he did not wish copies to be circulated in any form or if Merton's immediate superior, Dom James, requested him to cease activity. Merton wanted to support pacifism, but only on his own terms and in so far as it did not adversely tarnish his reputation within the monastic institution.

Merton made constructive efforts through correspondence to overcome the sectarian divisions in Christian denominationalism that hampered Catholic and Protestant peace groups working together. Merton gave permission to John C. Heidbrink of the Fellowship of Reconciliation, the leading Protestant peace group, to reprint "The Root of War" for limited distribution so that Merton could make a contribution to peace activism.[224] Merton enlisted his monastic novices to mimeograph and to mail out his controversial political articles at the same time as Dom James was negotiating a smoother passage for Merton's controversial articles because mimeographs were not subject to Trappist censorship because they did not officially constitute publication by the Trappist censors. Merton would not have engaged in this activity without his abbot's tacit approval. Hildegard Goss-Mayr, an Austrian Catholic pacifist with the international wing of the group, wrote to Merton seeking his advice on how to process his articles through official censorship within the Trappist Order in Europe.[225] In the case of Austria, Merton advised, "they can handle that at Engelszell."[226] Engelszell Abbey is the only Trappist monastery in Austria. Merton was already familiar with the views of Hildegard Goss-Mayr's father, Karl Meyer, who published a

[224] Merton, "Letter to James Forest" (November 14, 1961), in *The Hidden Ground of Love,* ed. Shannon, 258.
[225] Hildegard Goss-Mayr to Thomas Merton, January 8, 1962, Section A: Correspondence, TMC.
[226] Merton to Hildegard Goss-Mayr, October 14, 1962, Section A: Correspondence, TMC.

pacifist magazine *Der Christ in der Welt* in Austria. In December 1961, Merton had written to the editors of the pacifist *Liberation* magazine in the United States to lend his support to Meyer's observation that pacifist action was not of concern to mainstream media in his highlighting of the absence of media coverage of the San Francisco-to-Moscow Peace Walk, which had taken place between December 1960 and October 1961.[227] Merton advised readers of *Liberation* pacifist magazine not to become discouraged by their failures.[228] In this, he projected himself through writing as an informal pastor to the scattered peace groups, which was the role that Merton most cherished in the manner of Archbishop Roberts who played a similar role within the Pax Society in England.

Merton played a double game of submitting his articles to be officially censored for publication while, at the same time, privately circulating his letters in *samizdat* fashion within his correspondence circle. Merton redrafted similar content under different working titles without comprehensive revision because he was motivated to do anything to support Catholic Action for nuclear pacifism. The *Commonweal* article remained deadlocked while Merton worked to make sure his writings went into circulation within pacifist networks by any means possible. Merton asked Dom James to convince the censors to review "another article" while the *Commonweal* article was going through a third censorship. Dom James, once again, intervened on Merton's behalf with the censors concerning the article: "Now another point from our end of the 'battlefield' is another article by Father Louis. It is not, indeed, a spate article, but sort of a Preface to an Anthology of essays in regard to the present world situation, where

[227] Merton, "To the Editor of Liberation," in *Witness to Freedom: the Letters of Thomas Merton in Times of Crisis*, ed. William Shannon (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1994), 95-96.
[228] Ibid.

the threat of nuclear destruction of the human race hangs over all our heads."[229] Although the "anthology" mentioned was *Breakthrough to Peace* that was being published by Laughlin's New Directions in New York, Merton's "preface" which was published as the anthology's introduction needed to be approved for publication by the Trappist censors. Merton's *Commonweal* article was still deadlocked. Dom James related to Fr. Paul Bourne the psychological "battlefield" they occupied continued to looped around Merton's so-called "little articles" against war and the ensuing volleys of letters between Merton, the censors, and his religious superiors.[230] The weariness of all parties involved in protracted censoring of Merton's *Commonweal* article is palpable through correspondences between Dom James and Bourne. Correspondence between Dom James in Kentucky and Bourne in Georgia indicate that reasons for the delay in censorship was a backlog in the processing of articles from other Trappist houses undertaken by a small censorship team in the Trappist monastic daughter house in Georgia.[231] This was not as nefarious as Merton had imagined.

Fr. Shane Regan a censor at New Melleray Abbey, Dubuque, Iowa had granted permission for Merton to publish. By contrast, Fr. Bellarmine McQuiston was critical of Merton's lack of rigour. McQuiston commented in his report: "But this subject is so vital that we should run no risk of confusing the issue in the minds of Christians. Hence, the Nihil Obstat is not granted."[232] McQuiston viewed Merton's argument as too obtuse and potentially confusing to the public.

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[229] Dom James Fox, O.C.S.O. to Fr. Paul Bourne, O.C.S.O., January 23, 1962, Section A: Correspondence, TMC.
[230] Ibid.
[231] Dom James Fox, O.C.S.O. to Fr. Paul Bourne, O.C.S.O., January 22, 1962, Section A: Correspondence, TMC.
[232] Fr. Bellarmine McQuiston, O.C.S.O., and Fr. Shane Regan, O.C.S.O., "The Human Way Out." [Preface to *Breakthrough to Peace*]. February, 1962, Series 68 # 02, Section A: Correspondence, TMC.

Trappist censors were especially confused by Merton's doubts in nuclear deterrence, and he was on shaky ground. Merton's criticism can best be evaluated as his techno-scientific pessimism as expressing criticism of the deterrence bluff that each expression of intent to use nuclear weapons, purposively to enhance credibility and effectiveness, could only work to undermine the non-use inhibition, bringing the nation one step closer to the nuclear war that deterrence was supposed to avert.[233] Behind the scant comments of the Trappist censors was an acceptance of nuclear deterrence as having had worked to date in maintaining the international peace so their conclusion was that it would do so in the future.

Fr. Charles English perceived a middle way between Merton's freedom to publish, supported by Dom James, and the necessity to preserve institutional reputation, which was the principal concern of Trappist censors. Fr. Charles, in his report, advised Merton to remove any explicit reference to ethics of nuclear war in the article's title: "I believe that this change will remove it from an ex professo category since Father is not a professional [theologian]."[234] Merton's deontological ethics of perfect duties consistent with the dignity of human life, but deaf to any alternatives other than the abolishment of war, was the primary reason why monastic authorities passed Merton's draft essay for *Commonweal* through three separate censorships from November 1961 to January 1962.[235]

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[233] Merton, "Letter to Pablo Antonio Cuadra Concerning Giants," in *Selected Essays*, ed. Patrick O'Connell (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2013), 125; Merton, "Nuclear War and Christian Responsibility," *Passion for Peace*, ed. Shannon, 39.

[234] Fr. Charles English, O.C.S.O., "Christian Ethics and Nuclear War." January 13, 1962, Series 35 # 05, Section A: Correspondence, TMC.

[235] Fr. Bellarmine McQuiston. O.C.S.O., and Fr. Charles English, O.C.S.O., "Christian Ethics and Nuclear War." January 13, 1962, Series 35 # 05, Section A: Correspondence, TMC.

The problem for the censors was that Merton's argument hinged on a rhetorical fallacy that the possession of nuclear weapons was tantamount to intentions to wage war. Merton's reductionist argument resulted in a protracted censorship.

The issue that was at stake for Merton was his perception of the role of monasticism in the modern world that was different from that of the censors. Merton's emotional character comes across through correspondence between Dom James Fox and Fr. Paul Bourne. In their private correspondence, Dom James refers to Merton as the monastic order's "*l'enfant terrible*" due to his compulsion to write on issues perceived by his institutional superiors as inappropriate for a sequestered monk.[236] It was the slowness of the censorship process that frustrated Merton who wrote to James Forest that the censorship he was encountering was, "completely and deliberately obstructive, not aimed at combing out errors at all, but purely and simply preventing the publication of material that 'doesn't look good.' And this means anything that ruffles in any way the censors' tastes or susceptibilities."[237] Merton projected through his correspondence a distortion of Catholic censorship as based on his viewpoint that the censors were unconcerned with nuclear proliferation, whereas, the censors considered that nuclear war was not an appropriate topic for a cloistered monk.

In summary, Merton perceived himself as locked within his private cold war with religious authorities and his frustration had much to do with his perception of the internal politics of the cloister.[238] Catholic censorship should not be seen as restricted to policing the boundaries of religious belief. It was also an opportunity for this community of belief to tease out the meaning of its

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[236] Dom James Fox, O.C.S.O. to Fr. Paul Bourne, O.C.S.O., January 22, 1962, Section A: Correspondence, TMC.

[237] Merton, "Letter to James Forest" (January 5, 1962), Forest, *Living with Wisdom*, 140, 223, n.235; *The Hidden Ground of Love*, ed. Shannon, 261.

[238] Merton, *Turning Toward the World* (December 18, 1960), ed. Kramer, 175.

engagement with secularism.[239] Merton overstated his commitment to the dignity of human life by advocating for a pacifist position that could oppose all war, not just nuclear war, because of the existential threat posed to humanity by nuclear weapons that was conditioned by his acceptance of hard technological determinism. Merton's correspondence can also be taken as a reading of his confessional state as he disavowed the juridical power of Trappist censorship within the purpose of avowing his commitment to the dignity of human life as a manifestation of his inner conversion as a dimension of personal formation. This enfolded Merton's moral perspective on nuclear deterrence as one based on intrinsic hostility rather than deterrence as orientated by non-use of nuclear weapons and, therefore, as technology management.

Merton, Pastor through Correspondence

This section argues that the negative effects of protracted censorship on Merton was having a psychological impact on him as he was beginning to reconsider whether it was prudent for him to be so directly involved with peace activists. Trappist censors were concerned that Merton's misunderstanding of nuclear deterrence would tarnish the reputation of Trappists in America.[240] It was for this reason that Trappist censors delayed Merton's publishing from November 1961 to January 1962.[241] The unintended consequence of Merton's coalition with the Catholic Worker movement was that his writings were beginning to take on a

[239] Una Cadegan, *All Good Books are Catholic Books: Print Culture, Censorship, and Modernity in Twentieth-Century America* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2013).
[240] Merton, "Peace: Christian Duties and Perspectives," January 9, 1962, Series 110 # 04, Section A: Correspondence, TMC.
[241] Fr. Bellarmine McQuiston, O.C.S.O., and Fr. Charles English, O.C.S.O., "Christian Ethics and Nuclear War." January 13, 1962, Series 35 # 05, Section A: Correspondence, TMC.

symbolic value for peace activists who conflated fallout shelters and the resumption of nuclear testing with U.S. warmongering.

Merton hoped that plans for a new U.S. affiliate of the Pax Society in England would make pacifism more palatable to an American public and it was with this desire that Merton projected himself to his interlocutors as representing a legitimate Catholic position despite the fact that Trappist superiors did not regard Merton as having a religious mandate to speak on nuclear weapons as a moral issue. The publication of Merton's *Commonweal* article coincided with the Catholic Worker's participation in the General Strike for Peace in New York in which James Forest participated in a nonviolent protest against U.S. resumption of testing in the atmosphere.[242] Merton, from his cloister in Kentucky, expressed his support by offering his Mass on 1 February 1962, the first day of the strike, as an act of solidarity with anti-war protesters as he perceived the convergence of the peace strike and the publication of his article as being providential.[243] This was not incidental because for Catholics the concept of Eucharist is a way of seeing and narrating the world, through expression of liturgical performance, that is integral to ways of acting in the world. The Eucharist is the ritual enactment of the redemptive power of God, rooted in the torture, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Merton and Forest who were both Catholic converts understood the significance of this symbolism by which Merton was lending his moral support and endorsement to the actions of pacifists whose actions bore witness to the immorality of war, but were also illegal in the eyes of state officials.

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[242] Merton, *Turning Toward the World* (February 13, 1962), ed. Kramer, 202-03.

[243] Merton to James Forest, January 29, 1962, Section A: Correspondence, TMC, typed and mimeographed as Merton, "Cold War Letter # 25 to James Forest" (January 29, 1962), in *Cold War Letters*, eds. Bochen and Shannon, 58; Merton, *Turning Toward the World* (March 2, 1962), ed. Kramer, 206.

The protesters observed peace vigils at nine points in Manhattan in the bitterly cold first week of February 1962. Members of the Catholic Worker movement staged sit-ins at the headquarters of the United Nations and Atomic Energy Commission in New York. Catholic Workers picketed two fallout shelters at Grand Central Station and Penn Station. The strikers came across a less hostile public because private shelters as a "big business hoax" had caught the public imagination.[244] Forest had taken the initiative on behalf of the Catholic Worker in New York to protest against U.S. government resuming nuclear testing in the atmosphere without Dorothy Day's support because she was increasingly away from the headquarters of the Catholic Worker in New York, visiting other communities around the United States. His action manifested a loosening of Day's autocratic control and growing divisions that resulted from disaffected young volunteers who were not as concerned with the need to preserve good relations with Francis Spellman, Archbishop of New York, whose tacit approval Day had required.[245] Forest left the movement following his arrest in March 1962 for protesting against U.S. resumption of atmospheric testing.[246]

Forest was working to present Merton to his readers as an American Catholic writer who supported nuclear pacifism from within the heart of the religious institution in order to give moral legitimacy to anti-nuclear dissent.[247] Merton and Day both represented an older generation of religious radicals who were willing to work with Catholic religious authorities, whereas, Forest, who was 20 years old at the time, represented a younger generation of religious radicals prepared to take to the streets to express their protest and who were less

[244] Jean Morton, "Strike Reports," *The Catholic Worker* (New York), February 1, 1962, 7.
[245] Forest, *Writing Straight With Crooked Lines*, 126-28.
[246] Ibid, 128.
[247] Jim Forest, "Thomas Merton on the Strike," *The Catholic Worker* (New York), February 1, 1962, 7.

concerned with keeping faith with religious authority. Merton wrote to Forest, protest leader in New York, to communicate his solidarity with the anti-testing protestors while also condemning mainstream Americans who "feel terribly threatened by some little girl student carrying a placard, or by some poor workingman striking in protest."[248] Merton cautioned Forest against falling prey to the lure of fast results in the sustained work that was required to shift attitudes within culture. Forest published Merton's letter in the *Catholic Worker*, which was distributed on the picket lines on the second day of the strike.[249] Forest published Merton's letter. Merton would have to address the morality of supporting the illegality of radical pacifists protesting against the U.S. government. The risk for Merton was that reports of his support for the protesters in the *Catholic Worker* newspaper could be mistaken by his readers as expressing his unqualified support for nuclear pacifists at a time when the Catholic Church did not sanction pacifism and protests were illegal actions.

Merton's experience of Trappist censorship caused him to reconsider whether it was prudent for him to be so directly involved with peace activists who were engaged in illegal protests against U.S. foreign policy. Merton had sent Forest an uncensored revision of his *Commonweal* essay while it was still under review.[250] On 5 February 1962 Merton wrote to Forest in an attempt to hold off publishing an uncensored revision of his *Commonweal* article.[251] Forest had already sent the uncensored version to press before Merton could retract his

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[248] Merton, "Cold War Letter #25 to James Forest" (January 29, 1962), in *Cold War Letters*, eds. Bochen and Shannon, 59.
[249] Forest, "Thomas Merton on the Strike," *The Catholic Worker*, 7.
[250] Merton, "Letter to James Forest," (February 5, 1962), in *The Hidden Ground of Love*, ed., Shannon, 263.
[251] Merton to James Forest, February 5, 1962, Section A: Correspondence, TMC; Merton, "Christian Ethics and Nuclear War," in *Passion for Peace*, ed. Shannon, 56-64.

permission to publish.[252] On 6 February 1962, the end of week-long strike for peace, Merton wrote to Forest of his reservations:

> One of the most problematical questions about non violence is the inevitable involvement of hidden aggressions and provocations [underlined by Merton]. I think this is especially true when there are a fair proportion of non-religious elements, or religious elements that are not spiritually developed. Yet there is that danger: the danger one observes subtly in tight groups like families and monastic communities, where the martyr [underlined by Merton] for the right sometimes thrives on making his persecutors terribly and visibly wrong. He can drive them in desperation to the wrong, to seek refuge in the wrong, to seek refuge in violence.[253]

The focus was on personal formation as a necessary requirement for political transformation. Merton, however, had been chastened by his experiences with the Trappist censors regarding his controversial *Commonweal* article and this is detectable in Merton's comments to Forest that highlighted a new note of caution not previously detectable in Merton's letters. His advice now expressed a new tone of caution as a result of his experiences with censorship.

Merton's prudence concerning his involvement with activists as a cloistered monk had been amplified by a note of caution that Merton had received from Czesław Miłosz in which his experiences in Eastern Europe had shaped his scepticism about the value of peace activism that could, itself, be usurped by the state. Miłosz reflected: "Any peace action should take into account its probable effects and not only moral duty. It is possible that every peace manifesto for every 1 person converted throws 5 persons to the extreme right by a reaction against 'defeatism.'"[254] Miłosz was acknowledging that in

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[252] Merton, "Letter to James Forest," (February 5, 1962), in *The Hidden Ground of Love,* ed. Shannon, 263.

[253] Merton to Forest, February 6, 1962. Section A: Correspondence, TMC retyped and mimeographed as Merton, "Cold War Letter #31 to James Forest" (February 6, 1962), in *Cold War Letters*, eds. Bochen and Shannon, 69.

[254] Czesław Miłosz, "Letter to Thomas Merton" (no date), in *Striving Toward Being: The Letters of Thomas Merton and Czesław Miłosz,* ed. Robert Faggen (New York: Farrar, Straus &

many cases one's opportunities were very limited indeed. In any event, one's expression of alienation should be a responsible one. For example, one should be alert to the grave risks created by "peace" movements which advocate unilateral disarmament but fail to acknowledge, steadily and clearly, that a side-effect of doing what they advocate might well be Soviet domination.

Merton prudently reflected on the implications of Czesław Miłosz's criticism for his vocational life as a monk and writer in a journal entry dated 6 February 1962: "a very important letter from Milosz, in reaction to the articles on peace I sent him. It touches me deeply because I respect his judgment more than that of anyone I know, on this question."[255] Merton appreciated Miłosz's point: "there are awful ambiguities in this peace talk and I do not want to end up by simply crystallizing the opinion I think is immoral."[256] Merton was wrestling with himself as to what his involvement should be from his cloistered remove. At the end of Merton's journal entry he concluded, that the "reality of my life is the reality of interior prayer, always, and above all. There is a large amount of delusion in all inordinate concern with action. Yet there must be the right action."[257] Merton edited his response to Miłosz in March 1962 as "Cold War Letter no. 56"[258] of the *Cold War Letters* that he circulated, in *samizdat* fashion, amongst his correspondence circle as a means to justify his actions, from within institutional Catholicism, as being a matter of conscience. Miłosz was especially concerned that Merton's involvement with peace activism would do more harm

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Giroux, 1997), 138; Jeremy Driscoll, "The Correspondence of Thomas Merton and Czeslaw Milosz: Monasticism and Society in Dialogue," *Logos* 11, no. 3 (2008): 37.

[255] Merton, *Turning Toward the World* (February 6, 1962), ed. Kramer, 200-01.

[256] Ibid.

[257] Merton to Msgr. John Tracy Ellis, March 1962, Section A: Correspondence, TMC, typed and mimeographed as Merton, "Cold War Letter #55 to Msgr. John Tracy Ellis" (March 1962), in *Cold War Letters*, eds. Bochen and Shannon, 113-14.

[258] Merton to Czesław Miłosz, March 1962, Section A: Correspondence, TMC, typed and mimeographed as Merton, "Cold War Letter #56 to Czesław Miłosz" (March 1962), in *Cold War Letters*, eds. Bochen and Shannon, 114-15.

by being so overtly political.[259] Merton replied to Miłosz by proposing that he could do more for the cause of peace through writing as a contemplative ground for American Catholic peace activism. [260] Miłosz doubted that Merton's associations with activists could be of value because Merton was not prepared to be critical of the self-contradictory nature of pacifism.[261]

After the General Strike for Peace in February 1962, Merton began to falter in his public support for pacifist protests, but it did not change his unwillingness to accept the paradox of nuclear deterrence. He commented through correspondence to Msgr. John Tracy Ellis: "can a total war be kept within the bounds of justice, and is it in fact the intention of the strategy makers to keep the war within such bounds?"[262] Ellis was expressing that the technology management *tactic* of deterrence was inherently moral because the tactic's efficacy was in attaining a morally normative goal. The moral task regarding nuclear weapons is thus twofold, as with all technologies. The first is to determine the purpose of their normative orientation. The second task is to evaluate actual practices and policies against that normative benchmark by considering how well actions conform to moral purposes. In contrast to Merton's imaginings, just war advocated restraint on war as a last resort.

At stake for Merton was his perception of the intellectual bad faith of Catholic moralists, which was a reflection of his techno-scientific pessimism. The U.S. posture of going to war only in self-defence or in pursuit of legitimate goals comes close to conforming to the *jus ad bellum* requirements. It was for

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[259] Merton, *Turning Toward the World* (February 6, 1962), ed. Kramer, 201.
[260] Merton, "Cold War Letter #56 to Czesław Miłosz" (March 1962), in *Cold War Letters*, eds. Bochen and Shannon, 114.
[261] Merton, *Turning Toward the World* (February 6, 1962), ed. Kramer, 200-01.
[262] Merton, "Cold War Letter #56 to Czesław Miłosz" (March 1962), in *Cold War Letters*, eds. Bochen and Shannon, 113-14.

this reason Merton concluded that from "a human and rational viewpoint there is every chance of a disastrous war in the next three to five years."[263] Merton regarded nuclear war as having an intimate connection with the policy of nuclear deterrence and this was why he evaluated the political atmosphere of the shelter scare as a campaign to "engineer consent" and make nuclear war at least a reasonable possibility in the American public mind.[264] Merton's techno-scientific pessimism took over in his speculations that Catholic moralists were capable of engineering consent through a theological language to justify cause for war either in support of national defence or to maintain U.S. national interests. This conditioned his argument in "Target Equals City," a title he loosely based on Robert C. Batchelder's *The Irreversible Decision, 1939-1950*.[265] Merton's essay is problematic. There is a confusion o*f temporalitie*s in his text that draws a loose association between the first atomic bombings in 1945 and the contemporary political atmosphere of the resumption of atmospheric testing in 1962. Merton argued that the inevitable outcome of military thinking in the atomic bombings of 1945 was as a consequence of decisions made due to the fog of war where the "targets" considered for the atomic bomb were "purely and simply cities" irrespective of whether these cities were legitimate military targets or not.[266] Merton had made a similar point in "Original Child Bomb" as his artistic reflection on the chain of events that led to the bombing of Hiroshima in 1945 as signifying a deliberate moral slippage in which practical ends overtook moral

[263] Merton, *Turning Toward the World* (February 27, 1962), ed. Kramer, 205.
[264] Merton, "Target Equals City," in *Passion for Peace*, ed. Shannon, 35.
[265] Robert Batchelder, *The Irreversible Decision, 1939-1950* (Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin, 1962).
[266] Merton, "Target Equals City," in *Passion for Peace*, ed. Shannon, 33.

means.[267] Merton's point was that the cost of war was in lives irrespective of whether those killed were targeted either as combatants or non-combatants. Everyone threatened in the threat to carry out limited nuclear options as city swaps or the destruction of enemy cities with their inhabitants in the course of a military exchange, is threatened as an innocent. Similarly, all those killed in the execution of the threat of final retaliation or the destruction of the enemy values, especially the lives of its citizens, in the event that we have nothing much left to lose, would be killed for nothing to do with their strategic status as either combatants or non-combatants but as survivors. All would be killed simply as people present in a city to be destroyed for the purpose of showing Western resolve and deterring further Soviet attack. All Japanese civilians of Hiroshima and Nagasaki were killed as inhabitants of cities whose destruction shocked Japan out of the war.[268] Merton's wording had affinities with casuistry as a process of reasoning in applied ethics that seeks to resolve moral problems by extracting or extending theoretical rules from a particular case, and reapplying those rules to new instances.[269] His argument was a static moral abstraction and this left no room for the professional moralist.

Merton directed "Target Equals City" against Catholic just war moralists as he concluded that the "moral situation" that justified nuclear deterrence had resulted from "a complete breakdown" of the just war teaching as a consequence of Catholic moralists as being "Pickwickian" for accepting too much at face value nuclear policy and seeking loopholes to justify nuclear "self-defense" as to

[267] Merton, "Original Child Bomb: Points for meditation to be scratched on the walls of a cave," in *The Nonviolent Alternative*, ed. Gordon Zahn (New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 1980), 3-11.
[268] Merton, "Target Equals City," *Passion for Peace*, ed. Shannon, 34.
[269] Hans-Johann Glock, "Doing Good by Splitting Hairs? Analytic Philosophy and Applied Ethics," *Journal of Applied Philosophy* 28, no. 3 (2011): 228.

conforming to the *jus ad bellum* requirements.[270] However, nuclear security and deterrence are not the same thing. Deterrence is one conceivable means to security. This was the wedge in conventional wisdom that had potential to open a space for the essential contribution of a moral perspective to nuclear security. Merton concluded that the only moral position to govern policy-making should be a "relative pacifist" position as recommended by the Stein symposium group and the English Pax Society in working for disarmament as predicated on the dignity of the human person. Merton, however, added his own polemic by proposing that these groups worked to "outlaw all nuclear war" as a course of action most consistent with Christian morality.[271] Again, Merton's commitment to the dignity of human life threaded through his argument.

The essay "Target Equals City" was never passed for publication by Trappist authorities during Merton's lifetime although it was slated for publication by James Forest in the *Catholic Worker*.[272] Merton did distribute the essay as mimeograph copies from February to March 1962 within his correspondence circle. Catholic moralists who supported the just war tradition rejected the highly partisan nature of Merton's argument. Americans could look upon the war as a clean, untarnished defence of liberty by pushing the allied bombings of German cities and the atomic attacks on Hiroshima and Nagasaki into the space of a forgotten background.[273] Merton had received initial feedback to "Target Equals City" from Msgr. John Tracy Ellis in Washington, D.C. on 27 February 1962 from a letter Merton sent him on 4 February 1962 in which Merton had written to Ellis seeking his advice. Ellis rightly advised caution as

[270] Ibid, 33 & 35.
[271] Ibid, 36.
[272] Jim Forest in discussion with James Cronin, Edinburgh, Scotland, UK, December 9, 2018.
[273] Patrick Smith, *Time No Longer: Americans After the American Century* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2013), 107.

Merton's pacifist thinking was far removed from Catholic moral philosophy and political reality.[274] Merton's deontological ethics, manifested by his commitment to the dignity of human life, in which the end in itself could never justify the means, demonstrated his unwillingness to make accommodations with political realities as he proposed that Catholic just war restraints of proportionality and non-combatant immunity could not adequately be met in the atomic era based on the massive destructiveness of nuclear weapons. This was precisely the objection that his interlocutors made of his opinions. Msgr. John Tracy Ellis, Merton's correspondent in Washington, D.C. whom Merton contacted for theological advice, proposed that limited war could be created by intelligence and energy within a moral framework: "isn't it possible that even the great harm that might be done by such action on our part would still be outweighed by the good accomplished, in preventing the Communist enslavement of the whole earth? I don't see why not?"[275] Merton imagined a future limited war in the nuclear era as equivalent to conventional warfare, but with greater risk of escalating to the use of nuclear weapons. He chose to respond to this objection in his essay "Target Equals City" by claiming, somewhat unjustly, that theologians were merely striving, "to patch up the traditional notion of just war and keep it functioning," by tying it up with the "limited" war of the tacticians.[276] Merton unjustly claimed that theologians had accommodated political thinking and so had contributed to wearing down Christian morality by justifying the cause of going to war.[277] Merton had only formed this opinion from his limited correspondence with Msgr. John Tracy Ellis and it demonstrated his unwillingness to grasp how

[274] Msgr. John Tracy Ellis to Thomas Merton, February 27, 1962. Section A: Correspondence, TMC.
[275] Ibid.
[276] Merton, "Target Equals City," in *Passion for Peace*, ed. Shannon, 35.
[277] Ibid, 36.

inconsequential the role moralists played in policy-making. Merton's commitment to the dignity of human life did not allow him to consider distinguishing civilians from military combatants in total war. Modern warfare was so dependent upon war production that at sites far away from the fighting the concept of a front line was irrelevant and so it was impossible to distinguish between combatants and non-combatants, as just war suggested.[278]

It was not only Catholic theologians who sensed the danger of Merton's misconceived opinions that by challenging deterrence he was doubting U.S. national security and the right of a nation to defend itself that remained morally permissible in Catholic thought. His correspondents also cautioned him to be careful. Initially, Merton mimeographed copies of "Target Equals City" for his correspondents who regularly received copies of articles he was planning to publish. One vocal recipient was Herbert Mason who was a professor in the Department of History and Religion in Boston University, Massachusetts, advised Merton, in a letter written on 27 February 1962, not to publish the essay. Mason wrote to Merton: "Please be careful. Don't print something such as 'Target Equals City': only your enemies would publish that."[279] On 9 March 1962 Merton replied to Mason: "I do not agree with your comment on this. I think the case is quite clear and needs to be stated. It would seem that this is the kind of evidence [Batchelder's *The Irreversible Decision, 1939-1950*] that needs to be stressed and is incontrovertible."[280] Merton felt self-assure in the moral righteousness of his position and that he was tapping into a legitimate

[278] A.C. Grayling, *Among the Dead Cities: Is the Targeting of Civilians in War Ever Justified?* (London: Bloomsbury, 2014).
[279] Herbert Mason to Thomas Merton, February 27, 1962, Section A: Correspondence, TMC.
[280] Herbert Mason to Merton, March 9, 1962, Section A: Correspondence, TMC, typed and mimeographed as Merton, "Cold War Letter #52 to Herbert Mason," (March 9, 1962), in *Cold War Letters*, eds. Bochen and Shannon, 106.

questioning of whether a nuclear war was controllable.[281] Merton reiterated to Msgr. John Tracy Ellis that the main difference between his position and that of Catholic just war moralists was "one of standpoint," so as to distinguish their different philosophical moorings.[282] Merton argued that Catholic theologians had accepted, "without question the rather pragmatic scale of values implied by the Cold War policies of our nation."[283] Merton's rejection of the American Catholic bellicose nationalism as based on the pre-supposition that nuclear weapons defended Catholicism against the threat of atheistic communism gave him a sense of his own exceptional position, but it was his pacifist polemics that weakened the credibility of his argument with professional theologians, rather than his commitment to the dignity of human life that had Thomist resonances.

The Trappist censor rejected "Target Equals City" *in globo* or in its entirety for publication not just for its pacifist views, but primarily as being inappropriate for a writer representing the Trappist Order. In particular, the Trappist censor rejected Merton's opinion that Catholic just war theory has suffered "a complete breakdown" due to two world wars and that traditional doctrine must always remain a point of departure on the ethics of war.[284] The censor's position strictly followed accepted Catholic thinking that tolerated nuclear deterrence although the Church espoused eventual disarmament. Merton's opinion, however, was "a fallacious and dangerous type of thinking" that was against the mind of the Trappist Order as a monk was not supposed to

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[281] Laura Fermi, "Review of *The Irreversible Decision, 1939-1950* by Robert C. Batchelder, Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1962," *The Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists* 18, no. 5 (May 1962): 38-39; Joseph Allen, "The Relation of Strategy and Morality," *Ethics* 73, no. 3 (April 1963): 167-78.

[282] Merton to Msgr. John Tracy Ellis, March 10, 1962, Section A: Correspondence, TMC, typed and mimeographed as Merton, "Cold War Letter #53 to Msgr. John Tracy Ellis" (March 10, 1962), in *Cold War Letters*, eds. Bochen and Shannon, 107.

[283] Ibid,108.

[284] Merton, "Cold War Letter #53 to Msgr. John Tracy Ellis" (March 10, 1962), in *Cold War Letters*, eds. Bochen and Shannon, 108.

be “involved in public controversy” such as debating with the morality of nuclear war, “especially on the side of the pacifists.”[285] Finally, the censor was vexed by how he had received the essay: “the copy of the author’s manuscript which I received was mimeographed.”[286] The fact that Merton had been circulating the essay before it had been censored reinforced the censor’s view that Merton was a disobedient monk who demonstrated disregard for Trappist censorship by his actions.

In summary, Merton’s seemingly reckless actions in circulating uncensored essays that had the potential to cause him reputational risk can be understood as an exercise in his disavowal of the juridical power of moralists as a means to avow pacifism. Despite the fact that Merton was well-intentioned, he did exaggerate his pacifism as being a legitimate Catholic position while Trappist censors did not regard Merton as having a religious mandate to speak on the morality of nuclear weapons. Merton was committed to the dignity of human life and appropriated the precept of the inviolability of innocent life as derived from Walter Stein’s symposium group, proposing that intention to possess nuclear weapons implied an intention to use in such a manner that there could be no moral justification of nuclear deterrence. It was his hard technological determinism that blunted his message beyond pacifist circles rather than his commitment to the dignity of human life that had a Thomist resonance that was acceptable within Catholic moral philosophy.

[285] Merton, “Target Equals City,” April 17, 1962, Series 143 # 05, Section A: Correspondence, TMC.
[286] Ibid.

Conclusion

Merton perceived himself as a truth-teller writing against the juridical power of religious authority in order to promote the message of his commitment to the dignity of human life. His lack of intellectual perspective betrayed his inability to comprehend the political and strategic value of deterrence for keeping the international peace. Merton negatively perceived the problem of nuclear weapons through his perspective of hard technological determinism as the context in which Merton framed his pacifist polemic as predicated on the difficulties of individuals in assuming personal responsibility within distributed systems that Merton rhetorically reduced to placing a premium on technical solutions and efficiency for the maintenance of greater security under the guise of preserving freedom. Merton's polemic was not directed at U.S. foreign policy, as such, but rather focused on his dissatisfaction with Catholic acceptance of nuclear deterrence as escalating the potential of nuclear risk.

It was Merton's perception of Catholic moralists as potential warmongers for accepting the paradox of nuclear deterrence rather than any bad intentions on the part of the Trappist censors concerning Merton's right to express his opinions that was the reason why monastic authorities required the draft of his *Commonweal* essay to pass through three separate censorships from November 1961 to January 1962. Merton had pacifist supporters within the monastic institution. It was Fr. Charles English, a Trappist censor and former member of the Catholic Worker movement, who broke the deadlock that allowed Merton to submit to *Commonweal* magazine. This would not have been possible without the support of Merton's immediate superior Dom James Fox who valued Merton's integrity as articulating a school of Christian pacifism that validated

individual freedom of conscience to abstain from violence that was not contingent on the power of the state.

Within the narrow circle of Merton's correspondence, he conflated nuclear preparedness with national bellicosity endorsed by his perception of warmongers within American Catholicism. Wilbur Ferry and James Laughlin reinforced Merton's negative perception that the United States was on the road to total war and that American Catholics were oblivious to this fact. Merton's nuclear pacifism presupposed the validity of the just war theory, but it recognised that weapons of mass destruction were not easily harmonised with the traditional just war teaching. Nuclear warfare, in theory, violated two of the most important requirements of justice according to the just war doctrine: first, the principle of proportionality between the destruction of war and the evil it is supposed to avert, and second, the principle of leaving non-combatants unscathed. Merton's theological interlocutor, Fr. John C. Ford, S.J., recognised the failure of rigour in Merton's argument. Merton's uncritical acceptance of the reductionism of technological determinism prevented him working for a meaningful transparency of different philosophical origins underlying contending moral positions on deterrence and disarmament and their significant points of departure that could have added substance to these duelling monologues within Catholicism. To Catholic moralists nuclear deterrence constituted the lesser evil posed by the threat of communism. The reticence of the Catholic hierarchy and theologians to question nuclear deterrence was indicative of their acceptance that deterrence had worked to date in dissuading Soviet nuclear aggression and so would continue to do so in the future. Merton interpreted their silence on disarmament as an infraction of the perfect duties of Incarnational humanism. This was merely

a foil for Merton's partisan support of radical pacifism that went much further than English Catholic pacifists by espousing abolishment of all war, not just nuclear war.

Merton drew conclusions about nuclear weapons that the episcopal hierarchy had not made, namely, that mere possession of nuclear weapons risked a failure of deterrence that, in turn, risked war, even on a limited scale, that would constitute failure of deterrence. Merton improvised his dissent by mimeographing his letters of pastoral support for peace activism, in *samizdat*, fashion. Merton seemed oblivious to the fact that the private circulation of his essays as mimeographs exposed his writings to being manipulated by his correspondents for their political ends. Merton's pacifist polemics did little to make his position transparent and merely highlighted how estranged he was from the political realities of the world he claimed he was supporting through writing.

Chapter 4

Merton's Doubt in the Politics of Pacifism

(2 March – 11 April 1962)

On 17 March 1962, Msgr. John Tracy Ellis sent Merton a copy of an editorial from the *Catholic Standard*, archdiocese of Washington, D.C., "shocked" by Thomas Merton's *Commonweal* article for deliberately ignoring "authoritative Catholic utterances" and making "unwarranted charges about the intention of our government towards disarmament."[1] The editorial accused Merton of being an "absolute pacifist" and disregarding Roman Catholic authority on the legitimate responsibility of nations to defend themselves against attack.[2] Merton suspected the author to have been the paper's editor-in-chief, Philip M. Hannan, Auxiliary Bishop of Washington, D.C., a close friend of the family of President John F. Kennedy, whom Merton regarded as holding hawkish views and an "official Washington-Pentagon mentality all the way down."[3] Merton expressed his concern to James Laughlin that condemnation by a high-profile prelate would result in a backlash from superiors against Merton's pacifist writings.[4] Hannan

[1] Editorial, "Nuclear War and Responsibility," *The Catholic Standard* (Washington, D.C.), March 9, 1962, 6.
[2] Thomas Merton, *Turning Toward the World* (March 17, 1962), ed. Victor Kramer (San Francisco CA: Harper Collins, 1997), 211.
[3] Merton, "Letter to James Laughlin" (March 16, 1962), Thomas Merton and James Laughlin, *Selected Letters*, ed. David Cooper (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1997), 198.
[4] Ibid.

was particularly vocal on the dangers of the Soviet system as a fate worse than death.[5] Merton now had to consider whether his outspokenness risked his reputation as he went against mainstream opinion that the Cold War did not involve two morally equal forces, but pitted freedom against totalitarianism. Merton denied that such a distinction could be made between the nuclear superpowers because they were captured by the technology of their weapons.

This chapter argues that Merton's opinion that *threatening* to use nuclear weapons ought to carry the same moral stigma as actually *using* them went beyond accepted Roman Catholic teaching. A reputational risk for Merton as a cloistered monk was public episcopal criticism of his views in the American Catholic media as this had the potential to compromise the future of his writing commissions and his potential to publish. Merton drew fire from the *Catholic Standard* in Washington, D.C. for pressing home the point that qualified acceptance of deterrence should not be an impediment for the Catholic Church speaking for disarmament. This chapter is orientated by Merton re-evaluating his engagement with radical pacifism during the *Cold War Letters* project as a consequence of his experience of Trappist censorship. The first section argues that the factor of reputational risk exposed tensions between Merton's espousal of pacifism and his hesitancy as to how he should act on his espoused values on the dignity of human life. He chose to navigate this situation of uncertainty by refusing to respond directly to his detractors so as to avoid the imposition of sanctions from his religious superiors that could risk the completion of his project for New Directions and a potential publication deal with Macmillan publishing in New York. Merton, however, quietly continued his pastoral support

[5] L. Bruce Van Voorst, "The Churches and Nuclear Deterrence," *Foreign Affairs* 61, no. 4 (1983): 833.

through correspondence as he became more conscious of the necessity to ground pacifism in the spiritual roots of protest as a means to justify the legitimacy of his actions both to himself and his correspondents. The second section argues that Merton used his monastic *ascesis* with its emphasis on personal formation for action in the world to impress upon James Forest and members of the Catholic Worker from New York the necessity for them to ground their pacifism in spiritual roots. Merton's prudent advice to peace activists was to try to find a balance between action and non-action by falling prey to the lure of quick results and staying committed to the ideal. However, this had the effect of doubling-down on his conformation bias against moralists within the religious institution. The third section argues that Merton's moral absolutism worked against him gaining support from nuclear physicist Leó Szilárd. Merton's advocacy for the abolishment of nuclear weapons went against the grain of Szilárd's more realistic political efforts to seek arms control. Merton was seeking to open dialogue with Szilárd. The significant fact was that Szilárd had begun to build the Council to Abolish War, a grassroots movement that sought to lobby for arms control.

In summary, Merton's use of pacifism was as a mode of veridiction that disavowed the juridical language of religious moralism justifying nuclear weapons for national security. Merton's view was that nuclear weapons, as instruments of idolatry, violated the dignity of life and so he disavowed Catholic theologians as "warmongers" because of their hesitancy to condemn all nuclear weapons. His moral idealism demonstrated a political naivety. The lesson Merton was learning through experience was to be more cautious in how he communicated his pacifism to the public. In the light of this, he reassessed his priorities as associated with bringing his essays to completion as an anthology

for Macmillan publishers.[6] Merton's privileged position within the religious institution gave his writing a modicum of prestige within Catholic America that he wished to maintain. Merton justified his withdrawal from public debate on pacifism as best serving the embryonic American Catholic peace movement by writing from within the religious system that gave him legitimacy as a writer in the eyes of the American public.

Reputational Risk for Merton

This section argues that the issue of reputational risk exposed tensions between Merton's espousal of pacifism as his commitment to the dignity of human life and his hesitancy as to how he should act on his beliefs. It was his primary concern for his freedom as a writer that motivated him to refuse to respond directly to his detractors so as to avoid the imposition of sanctions from his religious superiors that could risk the completion of his project for New Directions and a potential deal with Macmillan publishing in New York.

Merton prefaced his mimeographed *Cold War Letters* with the following declaration: "there is no witch here, no treason and no subversion."[7] Rowan Williams in 2020 is valuable in highlighting monastic *ascesis* as a practice in seeking authenticity.[8] For Merton, spiritual protest was synonymous with personal formation to promote political transformation. He writes of the Desert Fathers: "Society – which meant pagan society, limited by the horizons and prospects of life 'in this world' – was regarded [by Christian hermits] as a

[6] Merton, *Peace in the Post-Christian Era*, ed. Patricia Burton (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2006).
[7] Merton, "Preface" (January 1963), in *Cold War Letters*, eds. Christine Bochen and William Shannon (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2006), 3; Merton, *Witness to Freedom: Letters in Times of Crisis* ed. William Shannon (New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 1994), 19.
[8] Rowan Williams, *The Way of St. Benedict* (London: Bloomsbury, 2020), 9.

shipwreck from which each single individual man had to swim for his life."[9] Benedictine monastic *ascesis* offered an alternative way of living in the world. Williams acknowledges this as speaking back to Alasdair MacIntyre in 1981 whose "Benedict option" drew on the anarchistic tendencies of some early Christians during the late Roman Empire whose salvaging of the Classical tradition of Late Antiquity led them to form new modes of social relationships.[10] Merton had drawn a parallel between the Desert Fathers and a "modern social philosopher" like Lewis Mumford calling for the emergence of "the modern personalist man" who could uphold Merton's commitment to the dignity of human life.[11] The rationale of monastic *ascesis* is that it offers the monk space and time to develop as a person, but this is predicated on a Christian ontology of personhood that relates to Thomistic "*dignitas*" asserting human autonomy, originating from the rationality of human nature, towards an aim that coincides with human good.[12]

For Merton publishing in the *Catholic Worker* newspaper was a minor reputational risk, but the risk to his reputation increased once he had committed to publishing in *Commonweal* magazine which was a media outlet that had potential to expose his monastic perception of nuclear deterrence to national scrutiny. Merton was aware of this reputational risk and that he needed to be prudent. It was for this reason that he privately wrote to Msgr. John Tracy Ellis on 4 December 1961 asking Ellis to report back as to how his writings were being received. Merton wrote to Ellis: "I hope you will be a bit of a weather

[9] Merton, *The Wisdom of the Desert* (New York: New Directions, 1960), 4.
[10] Ibid, 8; Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory* (1981; repr. London: Bloomsbury, 2016), 305.
[11] Merton, *The Wisdom of the Desert*, 4.
[12] Eleni Procopiou, "The Thomistic Perception of the Person and Human Rights," *Studia Gilsoniana* 6, no.1 (January-March 2017): 133.

bureau for me there in Washington. If you hear anything I ought to know, I hope you will pass the word along. I mean especially about reactions to what I write on this subject."[13] The subject was pacifism. Merton's *Commonweal* article, "Nuclear War and Christian Responsibility" was finally published on 9 February 1962.[14] Merton was initially gratified that his opinions appeared to have attracted public attention as he noted in a journal on 13 February 1962 some initial reactions to his essay.[15] Merton noted as follows:

> Everybody says to me: "*You* speak! Everybody respects *you*! Everybody will listen to *you!*" A John Bircher writes asking me to defend the John Birch Society, "which is being heaped with ridicule." A man wanted to take my Peace Article in the *Commonweal* and buy space and run it as an ad in the *N.Y. Times*. . .Everybody wants me now to say something, except the censors who want me to shut up.[16]

Merton imagined himself as making a positive intervention, but his perception was different from how some pacifists perceived his motivations. The Catholic periodical *America* magazine had blamed the ambiguity of Catholic liberals failing to provide an adequate response to the fallout shelter scare for the rise of right-wingers like the John Birch Society that included Catholics within their membership.[17] Not all members of the Catholic Worker movement were as supportive of Merton as Dorothy Day and James Forest had been as Merton noted in his journal: "One of the boys at *Catholic Worker* wrote to me a taunting letter saying that in speaking for this community, I spoke as the mouth of a dead body. But is it true to say I speak for this community? I hope not!"[18] Merton wrote that the "highest vocation in the Kingdom of God is that of sharing one's

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[13] Merton to Msgr. John Tracy Ellis, December 4, 1961, Section A: Correspondence, Thomas Merton Center, Bellarmine University, Louisville, KY, afterwards TMC.
[14] Merton, "Nuclear War and Christian Responsibility," in *Passion for Peace: The Social Essays*, ed. William H. Shannon (New York: Crossroad, 1995), 37-47.
[15] Ibid.
[16] Merton, *Turning Toward the World* (February 13, 1962), ed. Kramer, 202-03.
[17] Robert Graham, "The John Birch Society," *America* (New York), December 2, 1961, 324-29.
[18] Merton, *Turning Toward the World* (February 17, 1962), ed. Kramer, 203.

contemplation with others," he acknowledged, "the possibility of mistake and error is just as great as the vocation itself."[19] The prudent person will always be on guard, fully aware how tricky human nature is, and how easily individuals can lie to themselves. Christ's followers must behave as *if* the kingdom of God had already arrived.[20]

Dom James Fox regularly reported the vocational lives of monks in his care to the Abbot General in Rome. Dom James favourably reported on the initial reception of Merton's *Commonweal* article and justified Merton's opinions as rooted in papal authority:

> The first article which had to go to three censors before approval was finally printed in a magazine of Catholic ownership, COMMONWEAL, and not of too great circulation. The reports that have come in in regard to it have been very, very favorable, and people thank Father Louis for his views and the wonderful expression he has made to try to turn men's minds away from war as the only way to solve international problems. Father Louis bases himself especially on our present Holy Father's Christmas Message, Which was in effect: "By all means, shun force."[21]

It is significant that Dom James mentioned here that *Commonweal* was a magazine of limited circulation because this reduced the reputational risk to the Trappist Order that the censors had worked to avoid. Merton claimed no more than simply restating the teaching of Pope John XXIII who called Christians to be active peacemakers. Merton had written of "peace" in *Commonweal* as the justice of the universal Kingdom of God through which the Catholic Church was its physical manifestation in the world. The religious imperative was for believers to model the aspirations of that Kingdom in their vocational lives as citizens. Merton wrote:

> The lack of man's response to this call says Pope John, is the "most terrible problem of human history." (Christmas message, 1958) Christ our Lord did not

[19] Merton, *New Seeds of Contemplation* (1961; repr. New York: New Directions, 2007), 270-71.
[20] Karen Armstrong, *Fields of Blood: Religion and the History of Violence* (London: Bodley Head, 2014), 125.
[21] James Fox to Gabriel Sortais, February 14, 1962, Section A: Correspondence, TMC.

> come to bring peace to the world as a kind of spiritual tranquilizer. He brought to His disciples a vocation and a task, to struggle in the world of violence to establish His peace not only in their own hearts but in society itself.[22]

On one hand, this extract shows Merton's debt to Jacques Maritain and Catholic personalism in arguing that the aim of the Christian in the world was to develop the potential of the whole human person.[23] On the other, Merton's appeal to papal authority did not replace Catholic endorsement of the moral legitimacy of national defence as enshrined in Catholic moral philosophy.[24]

Merton could not accept that nuclear weaponry was a technology that could be managed. This conditioned his argument for *Commonweal*, but this position did not carry the authority of the Roman Catholic Church. Merton's unwillingness to accept the paradox of nuclear deterrence led him to conclude that it was a system of "genocidal threats" and counter-threats.[25] His reasoning was based on his supposition that American Catholics accepted deterrence as the plausible firebreak to an atheistic communist ideology.[26] Merton, here, was conditioned by the U.S. posture of going to war only in self-defence or in pursuit of legitimate goals as a condition that could be approved by Catholic moralists because it came close to conforming to the *jus ad bellum* requirements, as discussed in chapter three. The problem was that Merton discounted deterrence as the management of nuclear technology toward the end of non-use of nuclear weapons as conditioned by the tension of two global ideologies championed by two global powers. Merton, here, was expressing his in-group bias shared with

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[22] Merton, "Nuclear War and Christian Responsibility," in *Passion for Peace*, ed. Shannon, 39.
[23] Gabriel Flynn, "A Renaissance in Twentieth-Century French 'Catholic Philosophy,'" *Revista Portuguesa de Filosofia* 76, no. 4 (2020): 1576.
[24] Thomas Slater and Michael Martin, *A Manual of Moral Theology*, vol. 1 (New York: Benziger Brothers, 1909), 319.
[25] Merton, "Nuclear War and Christian Responsibility," *Commonweal* (New York), February 9, 1962, 509.
[26] J. M. Cameron, "Morality and the Bomb: review of Nuclear Weapons and Christian Conscience," ed. Walter Stein, forward by Archbishop Roberts, S.J., The Merlin Press, *The New Left Review*, 1, no. 12 (November/December, 1961): 68.

Dorothy Day and James Forest of the Catholic Worker movement in their opposition to U.S. militarism.

Roman Catholic pacifists were seeking to lobby for nuclear weapons to be discussed as a moral concern at the forthcoming Second Vatican Council. Archbishop Roberts in London who had proposed that Pope John XXIII establish a pre-conciliar and extra-conciliar commission that could collate the findings of secular experts with the traditions of Christian morality in preparations for the Second Vatican Council, but without success.[27] The flashpoint between Merton and the American Catholic episcopacy was that Merton appeared to be speaking for the Catholic Church in support of radical pacifism of Catholic laity in the embryonic peace movement, whereas, bishops highlighted their theological privilege over the Catholic laity. On 17 March 1962, Msgr. John Tracy Ellis sent Merton an anonymous editorial published in the *Catholic Standard* whose editor-in-chief was Philip Hannan, Auxiliary Bishop of Washington, D.C., accusing Merton of being "an absolute pacifist" whose *Commonweal* article confused Catholics by ignoring "authoritative Catholic utterances" and had made "unwarranted charges about the intention of our government towards disarmament."[28] Merton had cited Pope John XXIII who argued for the need to keep ideologies in check as a means of moderating the tensions of the Cold War and by asserting spiritual and moral values to guide responsible uses of science and technology.[29] Merton flagrantly disregarded the distinction between possession and use of nuclear weapons. The editorial presented Merton as spreading "defeatism" by questioning the legitimacy of nuclear deterrence in the

[27] David Hurn, *Archbishop Roberts, S.J., His Life and Writings* (London: Catholic Book Club, 1966), 58.
[28] Editorial, "Nuclear War and Responsibility," *The Catholic Standard*, 6.
[29] John XXIII, "*Mater et Magistra*," eds. David O'Brien and Thomas Shannon, *Catholic Social Thought: The Documentary Heritage* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1992), 117-18.

defence of the nation.[30] Merton's unwillingness to accept the paradox of nuclear deterrence blinded him to any distinction between possession and use of nuclear weapons that weakened the credibility of his argument. The *Catholic Standard* retorted that it was necessary to have nuclear weapons and to be willing to use them, precisely so that they would not be used.[31] To Merton, this demonstrated how the Catholic Church was captured by political ideology. Merton assumed that Catholic moralists contributed to the warmongering rhetoric that castigated Soviet, "H-bombs are from hell and ours are the instruments of divine justice" as conditioned by the U.S. posture of going to war only in self-defence or in pursuit of legitimate goals that could be approved by Catholic moralists. To Merton this implied, "that we have a divinely given mission to destroy this hellish monster and any steps we take to do so are innocent and even holy."[32] Here, "holy" means something distinctive and set apart. In the manner that Merton implies, it may be associated with American moral exceptionalism as something distinctive from atheistic communism. Within this theatre of opposing forces, the enemy was cast as totally malevolent and fully dedicated to evil. America was wholly innocent and committed, by its very nature, to truth, goodness, and light. In consequence of this, everything the enemy did was diabolical while everything America did was angelic. It was for this reason that Merton called incentives to wipe out Bolshevism, "one of the apocalyptic temptations of the twentieth-century."[33] "What are we defending?" Merton asked, "Our religion or our affluence? Or have we so identified the two that the distinction is no longer

[30] John Tracy Ellis to Merton, February 27, 1962, p. 2, Section A: Correspondence, TMC.
[31] Editorial, "Nuclear War and Responsibility," *The Catholic Standard*, 6.
[32] Merton, "Preface" (January 1963), in *Cold War Letters*, eds. Bochen and Shannon, 5.
[33] Merton, "Nuclear War and Christian Responsibility," *Commonweal*, 510.

possible?"[34] The point that Merton was making was that such moral distinctions were false. Merton was demonstrating the need for individual Americans to question the ideological assumptions of the Cold War. He laid most moral responsibility at the door of fellow Americans rather than condemning Russians.

There was no widespread determination amongst the clergy to challenge public policy on nuclear issues. American Catholic commentators demonstrated their Americanness to show there was no contradiction between their profession of faith and their loyalty as citizens. An example was Fr. John F. Cronin, S.S., Assistant Director of the National Catholic Welfare Conference (NCWC), the secretariat of the American Catholic hierarchy, who published a pamphlet entitled, *Communism: Threat to Freedom* in February 1962.[35] Cronin denounced "extreme pacifism" as the mark of fellow-travellers of communism. He stated that the American Communist Party favoured "stopping of U.S. nuclear tests and the banning of all weapons, including atomic, without adequate inspection."[36] Merton was part of an in-group of radical pacifists whose influence contributed to his rejection of the paradox of nuclear deterrence that Cronin accepted as being essential for maintaining U.S. credibility and for maintaining the international peace. The opinions Cronin expressed received support from Archbishop Patrick O'Boyle of Washington, and Cardinal Francis Spellman of New York, who was chair of the National Catholic Welfare Conference, Administrative Board.[37] The reason why the *Catholic Standard* editorial expressed shock at Merton's pacifism was because it was a stance so unexpected

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[34] Merton, *Peace in the Post-Christian Era,* ed., Burton, 74.
[35] John Cronin, *Communism: Threat to Freedom* (Washington, D.C.: National Catholic Welfare Conference, 1962).
[36] Ibid, 62.
[37] Stephen Koeth, "The Strength and Limits of American Catholic Confidence: Reverend John F. Cronin, S.S., and His Political Friendship with Richard M. Nixon, 1947–1960," *Journal of Church and State* 56, no. 4 (2014): 728.

from Merton who had embodied American Catholic triumphalism and moral certainty through his publications.

Merton remained morally certain, but he was prudent. One objector was Frank J. Sheed, founder of Catholic publisher, Sheed and Ward that brought the influential *We Hold These Truths* by Jesuit theologian Fr. John Courtney Murray, S.J., to press in which Murray debated church and state relations with the intellectual balance of a professional Catholic moralist. Merton explained his rejection of nuclear deterrence to Sheed not as a sign that he was a communist, but as his reaction in "the heat of the moment" to "the highly regrettable public statement of a Jesuit Father [Laurence McHugh] who seemed to be advising people to be completely ruthless and selfish and keep others out of their shelter with a gun if necessary."[38] Fr. Cronin, Assistant Director of the NCWC, argued that the American Communist Party opposed fallout shelters, "since they lessen opposition to possible nuclear war."[39] Merton considered it "very unfortunate that many people think that mere fact of hesitating to approve an all-out nuclear war makes a man by that very fact a communist."[40] Merton's perception of the role of a monk was interpreted differently by his interlocutors, but was primarily conditioned by their perception of him as being an American Catholic writer.

There was a sectarian undercurrent in criticism of Merton's stance that highlights the separateness of the Christian denominations before the opening of the Second Vatican Council in October 1962. Eugene Rose, later Fr. Seraphim Rose, an American in the Orthodox Christian rite, challenged Merton on the grounds of his Christian "idealism" as seeking to transform society as a project,

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[38] Merton, "Cold War Letter #32 to Frank Sheed" (February 1962), in *Cold War Letters* eds., Bochen and Shannon, 71.
[39] Cronin, Communism, 63.
[40] Merton, "Cold War Letter #32 to Frank Sheed" (February 1962), in *Cold War Letters* eds., Bochen and Shannon, 71.

like Christian "realists," whereas the focus of traditional Christianity was on the development of personal virtue where the transformation of humanity was the direct result of a person's interaction within society.[41] Rose was highlighting the difference of interpretation between the "social gospel" of Protestantism which seeks to transform society and the Orthodox and Catholic position of personal virtue that had faith that the Kingdom of God was to come and that the duty of the Christian was self-conversion rather than social transformation. Hence, the role of the monk, and of the Christian, was not to become embroiled within social and political problems. When Merton stressed that he wished to stay apart from any "movement" by concentrating on personal formation he was challenging similar criticism to that written by Rose who was critical of Merton transforming Catholicism into a form of social gospel which was a stance associated with American Protestantism. There is no evidence that Rose sent his letter to Merton and no response survives from Merton if Rose had done so.

Merton's confidence was shaken by criticism of him in the *Catholic Standard* editorial. Merton wrote to Dorothy Day requesting her prayers for his guidance: "I especially do not know what precisely Our Lord expects of me in regard to the world situation and peace, but I am sure that I must be careful not to overdo the activity and try to write too much about it. This is taking on something of the character of a temptation and I know I must be careful."[42] Merton's resort to prayer should be understood as a natural expression of his monastic *ascesis* and as his attempt to navigate tensions between worldly prudence, as relying on one's insights, and supernatural prudence. In this

[41] Eugene [Fr. Seraphim] Rose, letter to Thomas Merton, 1962, pp. 1-8, Section A: Correspondence, TMC.

[42] Merton, "Letter to Dorothy Day," March 21, 1962, in *The Hidden Ground of Love: The Letters of Thomas Merton on Religious Experience and Social Concerns*, 1, ed. William H. Shannon (New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 1985), 144.

situation, prayer, as an expression of heuristic thinking, was a method of sense-making for living in temporal uncertainty with Christian hopefulness.

The *Catholic Standard* editorial did nothing to dissuade Merton and it actually strengthened his commitment to the dignity of human life as enfolded within his moral perception of pacifism. He next wrote correspondence to support the International Fellowship of Reconciliation who were preparing a dossier on the issue of nuclear weapons for the forthcoming Second Vatican Council. Merton's contact in Europe was Hildegard Goss-Mayr. Since January 1962, Merton had been intermittently sending her copies of his articles and one of these that he was preparing was his collection of letters, subsequently collected as the *Cold War Letters*. Merton displayed prudence in editing. His method was to remove the recipient and personal information so as to protect the identity of the original recipient and then re-type for mimeographing the relevant sections from that letter that he considered most pertinent to the issue of nuclear weapons. For example, Merton candidly remarked in "Cold War Letter no. 55," originally sent to Msgr. John Tracy Ellis, "I feel grieved that I have given the impression of being a rebel against the Church. But equally certainly I do not feel that my conscience seriously reproaches me in this regard, at least as far as my own personal subjective dispositions are concerned."[43] The issue was how American Catholics expressed their loyalty as American citizens. Merton reassured Ellis that the *Catholic Standard* had misrepresented his intentions in his opposition to communism. Merton wrote:

> I fully recognize and appreciate the deep sincerity and obvious solicitude with which the President is trying to handle his most onerous responsibility. I do not envy his position at all, and I regret very much

[43] Merton, "Cold War Letter # 55 to Msgr. John Tracy Ellis," (March 1962), in *Cold War Letters*, eds. Bochen and Shannon, 113-14.

> indeed I have given the impression that I was simply dismissing his administration off-hand as a bunch of potential war criminals.[44]

Merton assured Ellis of his loyalty as an American and his faithfulness as a Catholic. Merton defended his religious orthodoxy with reference to Albert Meyer, Archbishop of Milwaukee and Chicago, in his criticism of a growing secularism in American culture.[45] Meyer, leader of Catholics in the Midwest, quoted from Merton's *Commonweal* article and Merton reappropriated Meyer's quotation as evidence for his readers that he did have some American episcopal support for his views. This was important for Merton to demonstrate his faithfulness as a Catholic and loyalty as a citizen.[46] Merton quoted Meyer, quoting Merton:

> We are overcome by evil not only if we allow the methods and standards of Communism to influence our own. If we adopt a policy of hatred, of liquidation of those who oppose us, of unrestrained use of total war, of a spirit of fear and panic, of exaggerated propaganda, of unconditional surrender, of pure nationalism, we have already been overcome by evil.[47]

This was the position Merton adopted in mimeographs he posted to Hildegard Goss-Mayr at the International Fellowship of Reconciliation in Vienna in December 1962, shortly after the closing of the first session of the Second Vatican Council, as evidence to advance the position to place the issue of nuclear weapons on the agenda of future sessions.[48] Merton circulated his *Cold War Letters* as pastoral support within his correspondence network in *samizdat* fashion. This choice of action manifested his worldly prudence as a way to avoid negative religious attention, but conditioned by his faith in supernatural prudence to guide his actions. These were dimensions of his prudence in which he was

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[44] Ibid, 111.
[45] Albert Cardinal Meyer, "Charity in International Relations," *The Catholic Mind* 60 (June 1962): 57-61.
[46] Merton, "Preface," (January 1963), in *Cold War Letters*, eds. Bochen and Shannon, 7.
[47] Merton, *Peace in the Post-Christian Era*, ed. Burton, 93.
[48] Hildegard Goss-Mayr to Merton, December 17, 1962, Section A: Correspondence, TMC.

evaluating the urgency of the moment to speak as weighed against both the personal and institutional risk he faced in speaking his truth to power.

An issue for liberal American Catholics was that the West stood for the freedom of self-determination, it could hardly claim with any integrity that all the people whose lives held through nuclear wager had freely granted the U.S. government the permission to conduct such a high-stakes game on their behalf. An example of this reasoning was expressed by Fr. Norris Clarke, S.J., Fordham University, who positively responded to Merton's *Commonweal* article for being utopian by virtue of the fact that Merton questioned nuclear weapons as a means to defend American values of freedom. Reinhold Niebuhr's "tragic" insight of American history had conceded to the pragmatic fact that defenders of freedom in the West might just have to adopt similar methods to those of the enemy if they hoped to be victorious.[49] Even without reflecting on the possibility of a nuclear exchange, Niebuhr appeared to accept implicitly that the United States would emerge the victor, however morally tainted. Merton's utopian idealism manifested his unwillingness to accept anything the United States might do over the Soviet Union and so contrasted with Niebuhrian realism that imagined international politics as essentially a struggle between aggressive totalitarianism and defensive democracy. Clarke consciously harnessed Merton in his rhetorical questioning of the national purpose.[50] "What are we defending?" Clarke asked, "Our religion or our affluence? Or have we so identified the two that the distinction is no longer possible?" Clarke commented:

> A similar diagnosis is made by Thomas Merton (*Commonweal* 2/9/62) from the vantage point of his Trappist monastery: "One of the most

[49] Reinhold Niebuhr, *The Irony of American History* (1952; repr., Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2008), 157.
[50] L. Bruce Van Voorst, "The Churches and Nuclear Deterrence," *Foreign Affairs* 61, no. 4 (1983): 840.

> disturbing things about the Western world of our time is that it is beginning to have much more in common with the Communist world than it has with the professedly Christian society of several centuries ago. On both sides of the Iron Curtain we find two profoundly disturbing varieties of the same moral sickness: both of them rooted in the fundamentally materialist view of life. . .total passivity and irresponsibility on the moral level plus demonic activism in social, military and political life." [. . .] In a word, what will it profit the West if it sweeps communism from the face of the globe and gains the whole earth – only to discover that it has lost its own soul in the process?[51]

Clarke, in a manner similar to Merton, was striking at a pre-supposition by American Catholics that nuclear weapons provided an effective bulwark against the threat of the infiltration of an aesthetic communist ideology. Nuclear deterrence as based on balance, not as an end in itself, but as a step on the way toward a progressive disarmament, may be judged as being morally acceptable. However, to ensure the Church's mission to work for peace it was important not to remain satisfied with a moral minimum. Clarke questioned these assumptions.

Merton had been especially heartened that his *Commonweal* article had been positively received in some quarters by Catholic laity. Merton noted in his journal: "I am glad of all the intelligent letters that have come in as a result of the peace articles," Merton further commented, "Justus Lawler wrote about the *Commonweal* one some time ago suggesting a book for Herder and Herder."[52] Justus George Lawler was an editor with Herder and Herder publishing house in New York. James Laughlin wrote to communicate to Merton that he was very sorry to hear about the attack on his *Commonweal* pieces in the *Catholic Standard* of Washington. Laughlin, however, encouraged Merton by reassuring him: "I know you will stick by what your conscience tells is right. I certainly hope that this kind of pressure will not prevent you, or Macmillan, from going ahead with the big peace book with them, which can do so much good in this

[51] Norris Clarke, "Is the West 'God's Civilization'?" *America* (New York), March 31, 1962, 856.
[52] Merton, *Turning Toward the World* (March 29, 1962), ed. Kramer, 214.

crisis."[53] The criticism of the *Catholic Standard* had chastened Merton as he was aware that his writing would now be subject to even closer scrutiny by Trappist censors. Criticism had not altered his belief in the righteousness of his actions.

In summary, mainstream American readers were confused by Merton's doubt in the moral legitimacy of nuclear deterrence. This was reflected in an overall poor reception of his *Commonweal* article that Justus George Lawler communicated to Merton as follows: "The *Commonweal* issue had very little impact so far as I have been able to tell, and we need to touch the American consciousness."[54] It baffled Merton's formerly supportive readers. Peter Steinfels, former editor of *Commonweal*, was one such confused reader in 1962. Steinfels was raised in Chicago within a Catholic family. He interpreted Merton's condemnation of nuclear weapons as Merton not having "done his homework" as the content was polemical in tone and confused more than it clarified for readers.[55] Merton's pacifist polemic seemed to mainstream American Catholics less a call to moral self-improvement than as undermining values of service to family, community, and the nation that Catholics associated with being good American citizens.

Merton as a Reflective Practitioner

This section argues that Merton used his monastic *ascesis* to impress upon James Forest and members of the Catholic Worker from New York of the necessity to ground pacifism in spiritual roots. Merton's advice to peace-makers was to try to

[53] Merton, "Letter to James Laughlin," (March 28, 1962), in *Selected Letters*, ed. Cooper, 198-200.
[54] Justus George Lawler to Merton, July 19, 1962, Section A: Correspondence, TMC.
[55] Peter Steinfels, "Engaging our Secular Age," Lecture, Bellarmine University, Louisville KY, May 23, 2015.

find a balance between action and non-action if they were not to succumb to the lure of quick results and stay committed to the task at hand. Merton realised that pacifists would face a long struggle and so individuals needed to live faithfully with uncertainty within Christian hopefulness.

A distinctive feature of Catholic peace activism was its faith-based character. The Roman Catholic recognition of the call to *metanoia*, a radical change of mind and heart as a form of ongoing personal formation, was grounded in the spiritual radicalism of the New Testament.[56] Dom James Fox permitted Merton to receive guests in a cinder-block house, about twenty-feet square, that the Trappist community had built for Merton as a writing retreat in the woods, a mile north of Gethsemani in 1960.[57] This hermitage was where Merton had been given permission by his superior to write at a remove from the hectic community life of the abbey, discussed in chapter one. Merton's emphasis on the balance between action and non-action was made tangible at the threshold to the hermitage. This was marked by a wooden cross with a cartwheel at its base on the lawn outside the door of the hermitage. Its crude construction held a deeper meaning by remembering the motto of the Carthusians: *Stat crux dum volvitur orbis* ("The Cross is steady while the world is turning"). The cross was a Christian symbol of hope that things would "turn out right" when subordinated to God-given justice.[58] Merton, through hospitality, could legitimately perform a pastoral role to support members of the embryonic Catholic peace movement.

Merton adopted an informal pastoral role for Catholic Worker radical pacifists echoing that performed by Fr. John Hugo who had formerly played a

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[56] Kelly Myers, "'Metanoia' and the Transformation of Opportunity," *Rhetoric Society Quarterly* 41, no. 1 (2011): 1-18.
[57] Merton, *Turning Toward the World* (December 2, 1960), ed. Kramer, 71-72.
[58] John Teahan, "Solitude: A Central Motif in Thomas Merton's Life and Writings," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 50, no. 4 (1982): 524.

role as retreat director to Dorothy Day of the Catholic Worker movement. Hugo had preached that all Christians, whether lay or religious, should strive for perfection of the New Testament relationship repair as espoused by the Sermon on the Mount.[59] Day, in a similar manner, regarded Merton as embodying the Christian perfectionist spirit that was the hallmark of Catholic Worker personalism that owed a debt to the influence of the Lacouture retreat under the stewardship of Fr. John J. Hugo of Pittsburgh during the 1940s.[60] Hugo shared a similar radical pacifism to Day, which is seen in Hugo's condemnation of the U.S. atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki in 1945 carried out, "by a nation that claimed to be acting in the very name of freedom; of moral justice, of civilization itself."[61] Hugo's countercultural stance attracted Day whose uncompromising radical pacifism conditioned her Catholic Action as expressed by providing food and shelter to the poor in New York.[62] The form of the Lacouture retreat afforded Day an opportunity to formulate a digest of the rigorous ethic of self-renunciation that she espoused in her writing and the Catholic Worker's variation on "the corporal works of mercy" which concern the material and physical needs of others: feed the hungry; shelter the homeless; clothe the naked; visit the sick and imprisoned; bury the dead; give alms to the poor.[63] In Day's mind, the Catholic Worker movement was distinguished by its

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[59] Lance Byron Richey, "Stages Along Life's Way: 'House of Hospitality' and the Development of Dorothy Day's Spirituality," *American Catholic Studies* 126, no. 1 (Spring 2015): 32-33.

[60] Patricia McNeal interview with Jim Forest, December 3, 1972 in *Harder than War: Catholic Peacemaking in Twentieth-Century America* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1992), 116 & 277, n.32.

[61] John Hugo, "Peace Without Victory," *The Catholic Worker* (New York), September 1, 1945, 2.

[62] Mel Piehl, "The Catholic Worker and Peace in the Early Cold War Era," *American Catholic Pacifism: The Influence of Dorothy Day and the Catholic Worker Movement,* eds. Anne Klejment and Nancy Roberts (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1996), 79.

[63] Jack Lee Downey, *The Bread of the Strong: Lacouturisme and the Folly of the Cross, 1910-1985*. (New York: Fordham University Press, 2015), 208.

interior prayer life, and the retreat was its heartbeat. Hugo morphed the Lacouture retreat into a spiritual wellspring for social action.[64]

Merton and Day both espoused the "Messianic Kingdom" as being embodied through personal formation and moral self-improvement as expressed through commitment to the values of "justice and mercy that respects the dignity of the person," expressed as communitarian personalism.[65] This depended on hospitality, an openness to encounter, which was a dimension of Benedictine monastic *ascesis*. Dom James had permitted Merton to extend his hospitality to James Forest and his colleagues from the *Catholic Worker* newspaper in New York in late February 1962. Merton reflected on the experience in his private journal:

> Several from the *Catholic Worker* spend the week here. Jim Forest, Bob Kaye, Nelson Born, Alex Merchant. George Johnson was here but had to leave last Sunday. Very good and very comforting to see the spiritual awareness and aliveness of these kids who have prayed, fasted, in vigil outside the UN, the AEC etc. for Peace. The new generation of the sit-ins. They are the most hopeful of signs and a great consolation. The truth is in them and they are simple and good and have nothing to do with anybody's official nonsense, certainly God is in them and guiding them – they are something of a faithful remnant in this eschatological time – friends and associates of the ones who went on the SF [San Francisco]-Moscow Peace March last year.[66]

The Peace March that Merton mentioned in his journal was the Committee for Nonviolent Action (CNVA) 6,000-mile disarmament march from San Francisco to Moscow in 1961. The CNVA, founded in 1958, was one of the first peace groups to focus on creating imaginative, dramatic demonstrations on both land and sea that sought to promote nuclear disarmament. Gandhi provided much of the group's inspiration through *satyagraha* to draw out the notion of defensive civil disobedience against laws that deformed the moral integrity of the person.

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[64] Ibid, 209.
[65] Merton, "Christianity and Totalitarianism," in *Disputed Questions* (London: Hollis & Carter, 1961), 130.
[66] Merton, *Turning Toward the World* (March 2, 1962), ed. Kramer, 206.

CNVA's actions included protests at nuclear test sites and walks for peace.[67] These were generally ignored by the American mainstream media and so most Americans were unaware of the sustained protests of anti-nuclear activists that could be easily condemned as being un-American in a conservative America post-McCarthyism. Merton used the phrase "this eschatological time" to evoke the apocalyptic motif of living faithfully with uncertainty within Christian hopefulness.

Merton, through correspondence, translated Christian hopefulness into pastoral action. In New York, James Forest was sentenced to fifteen days in prison on Hart's Island, part of the Bronx, on the westernmost edge of Long Island Sound, crowding the entrance to the East River.[68] Forest served his sentence for demonstrating against U.S. resumption of testing in the atmosphere. Merton corresponded with Forest while he was in custody. Forest only received Merton's letter on his release from jail, but it came as a sort of grace to him as he began to rebuild his life upon leaving the Catholic Worker.[69] Merton advised Forest to be patient with himself and with the progress of the peace activism by asking him to accept his physical confinement as a "grace" enabling him to discern the contradictory motivations of being a young activist. Merton wrote: "One can go from defending the health in these people to defending the sickness also. You know what I mean. But on the other hand the clergy tend to be altogether too scared of trouble, and take refuge in meaningless gestures, not

[67] Jim Forest, *The Root of War is Fear: Thomas Merton's Advice to Peacemakers* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2016), 100.
[68] Merton, "Cold Wat Letter #61 to James Forest" (March 21, 1962), in *The Hidden Ground of Love*, ed. Shannon, 264.
[69] Jim Forest in discussion with James Cronin, Edinburgh, Scotland, UK, December 9, 2018.

even of righteousness but just of legality. Pfui."[70] Merton's advice to Forest, as an activist in the field, reflected a spirit of *metanoia* that required personal formation as a person looked back on past decisions before moving on.[71] Merton did intend his pastoral support as a technique helping to sustain activists engaged in a long struggle that would, inevitably, have many failures and few successes.

Personally, Merton's pastoral care through correspondence was grounded by his particular writing projects. While Merton was writing to Forest in prison he was writing on Fr. Max Joseph Metzger, a Roman Catholic priest, executed by the Nazis in 1944, and the founder of the ecumenical Una Sancta Brotherhood in 1938 for ecumenical dialogue with Lutherans.[72] Una Sancta offered a model for the American Pax Association that Forest had been working to establish in 1961, but the future of this movement was uncertain in March 1962 and Forest's imprisonment made this more the case. Merton espoused the values of Metzger as a witness for peace because he espoused the dignity of human life. In practice, Merton was prudently avoiding censure and this was the motivating factor that caused him to anonymously publish on Metzger in *Jubilee* magazine so as not to attract unwanted attention from his superiors.[73]

Institutionally, Merton continued to be embroiled in struggles with Trappist censors over the process of his writings to publication and so his sense of having a pastoral role gave him a renewed purpose.[74] Merton's inescapable irony was of a man who knew political activism contravened his vocational life

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[70] Merton, "Cold War Letter #61 to James Forest" (March 21, 1962), in *The Hidden Ground of Love*, ed. Shannon, 265-66.
[71] Myers, "'Metanoia' and the Transformation of Opportunity," 11.
[72] Manlio Graziano, *Holy Wars and Holy Alliance: The Return of Religion to the Global Political Stage* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2017), 244.
[73] Merton, "A Martyr for Peace and Unity," ["Testament to Peace"] *Jubilee* (March 1962): 22-25; *The Non-violent Alternative*, ed. Gordon Zahn (New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 1980), 139-43; *Passion for Peace*, ed. Shannon, 53-55.
[74] Merton, *Turning Toward the World* (May 31, 1962), ed. Kramer, 222.

as a Trappist monk, but who chose to act all the same, even when his actions violated the mandates of his vocation for voluntary removal from the affairs of the secular world. Merton, however, considered his reputation through correspondence to Forest. Merton wrote that his concern was for the publications of the "peace articles" in book form. Merton warned Forest not to overdo mentions of him or use unauthorised quotations in the "CNVA paper" until Merton could work out how best he should proceed.[75] Merton's concerns were not without foundation because Forest, on his release from prison, had taken a job with the Committee for Nonviolent Action (CNVA), working at its office on Grand Street in Lower Manhattan.[76] Merton had no influence with the CNVA unlike in the Catholic Worker where he had the direct support of Dorothy Day who was editor of the *Catholic Worker* newspaper. Merton's renewed note of caution should be understood as the contradictory tendencies of Merton exploring the spiritual roots of protest to ground Catholic pacifism while he was avoiding being drawn into a public political debate.

Trappist spirituality was a penitent spirituality and there is a clear sense that Merton understood his involvement with activists as atoning for what he perceived were the failure of Catholic moralists for not speaking out against nuclear weapons and the failure of the faith-based activists for not joining forces, but choosing instead to remain separate due to their sectarian divisions. Merton was aware that the Catholic Church was far from being a perfect institution, yet a penitent Church could witness to what it should be and its aim in becoming.

Merton wrote to Charles S. Thompson, editor of the bulletin of the Pax Society of Britain, telling him: "An essay on 'Christian Action in World Crisis'

[75] Merton letter to James Forest, March 21, 1962, Section A: Correspondence, TMC.
[76] Merton, "Letter to James Forest," (March 28, 1962), in *The Hidden Ground of Love*, ed. Shannon, 266.

has been passed by the censors and will be shortly in *Blackfriars*. You may want to run a digest of it or parts of it. I mention that it got through the censors for this is always something of an achievement these days."[77] An American Trappist who had censored this essay struggled to understand Merton's criticism of the United States for legitimately defending itself. The censorship report stated:

> I understood it to mean that the U.S.A. threatens Russia with an all out war of annihilation. This means that she threatens something that is "completely immoral" and "nothing but murder" (supra). This contains an implicit condemnation of the U.S. government or President who are responsible for framing America's international policy [. . .] On reading the sentence again, I see that the threat can also be taken in a passive sense, i.e. the U.S. builds her international policy on the threat to her from Russia of an all out war. If this is the sense intended, it might be better to word it in such a way that there is no ambiguity.[78]

Catholic tradition had always admitted the legality of war where there was a just cause, right intention, and use of the right means. What was at issue was a Trappist perception that Merton had conflated his own pacifist opinion with being a legitimate Roman Catholic position. Merton had exaggerated this.

The Dominicans at Oxford University, who included members who supported the English Pax Society as Catholics opposing war, published Merton's essay in *Blackfriars* journal in June 1962.[79] The article was both a summary and a bolder statement of Merton's pacifism during the year of the *Cold War Letters* in which he argued that the effectiveness of nuclear deterrence, and the danger of its absence, was an exaggeration. Merton held the position that the destructiveness of nuclear weapons could not meet the condition of justice in

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[77] Merton, "Letter to Charles Thompson," (March 17, 1962), in *Making Peace in the Post-Christian Era* (London: Pax Christi, 2006), 43-44.

[78] Fr. M. Peter Logue, O.C.S.O. and Fr. M. Columban Heaney, O.C.S.O., "Christian Action in World Crisis," February 13, 1962; February 19, 1962, Series 34, Section A: Correspondence, TMC.

[79] Ibid.

the just war that was intended as a restrained to war.[80] It was because nuclear war would not meet the condition of justice that Merton advocated for nuclear pacifism. In the English Province, the Master-General Fr. Henry St. John, O.P., advised that Dominicans could offer pastoral guidance to individuals in the formation of their conscience, but he did not consider it appropriate to lend support to anti-nuclear organisations which made a condition of membership the belief that nuclear weapons had rendered any future war immoral. Even if that was their personal belief this went beyond the official position of the English hierarchy and of the Vatican.[81]

In March 1962 a majority of 67 per cent of Americans approved of the resumption of U.S. testing in the atmosphere.[82] President John F. Kennedy, in his radio and television address on 2 March 1962, announcing American resumption of atmospheric testing in late April, promised to conduct no high-yield tests, thereby reassuring the public that radioactive fallout could be contained.[83] Merton's opinion was clearly out of step with the majority of public opinion, but he was unaware of this because of his cloistered remove. His attention was drawn to discerning the spiritual roots of protest as the basis for personal formation. Merton wrote: "Annoyed, gratified and perplexed by the sudden growth of the Peace Movement. It is good. I do not fully know where it is going, but it is a good movement. Jim Forest is in Nashville on a Peace Walk, after 2

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[80] Merton, "Christian Action in World Crisis," *Blackfriars* 43, no. 504 (1962): 256-68; *Passion for Peace*, ed. Shannon, 80-91.

[81] Valerie Flessati, "Justice, Peace and Dominicans 1216-1999: IX — STOP WAR PLEASE Dominicans and the Christian Peace Movement in England," *New Blackfriars* 80, no. 945 (1999): 488.

[82] Eugene Rosi, "Mass and Attentive Opinion on Nuclear Weapons Test and Fallout, 1954-1963," *Public Opinion Quarterly* 29, no. 2 (Summer 1965), 285.

[83] Papers of John F. Kennedy. Presidential Papers. President's Office Files. Speech Files. Radio and television address to the American people: "Nuclear Testing and Disarmament," March 2, 1962, January 7, 2015, http://www.jfklibrary.org/Asset-Viewer/Archives/ FKPOF-037-023.aspx; Lawrence Wittner, *Resisting the Bomb: A History of the World Nuclear Disarmament Movement 1954-70* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1997), 413.

weeks in Hartz Island for the sit-down at the AEC."[84] With the departure of Forest from the Catholic Worker, Merton decided that it would be prudent to restrict his writings being unscrupulously used by those within the peace movement who would seek to manipulate his views for their own political ends. Merton attempted to repair damage to his reputation that James Forest unintentionally contributed to by rushing to publish Merton's articles before Trappist censors had sanctioned publication. Merton published an apology in the *Catholic Worker* for "Christian Ethics and Nuclear War," but he was also striking back at the *Catholic Standard* for accusing him of distorting papal pronouncements. Merton reiterated his position that ideology could not be defended through recourse to nuclear weapons and that it was the responsibility of the Catholic Church not to settle for its qualified acceptance of nuclear deterrence, but to work constructively for disarmament:

> It is true that we have a duty to resist all forms of materialistic and totalitarian encroachments on our religious liberty. But our desperation in the face of an ever growing world-Communism has made it more and more difficult for religious Americans to seriously consider disarmament and negotiations as practical possibilities. Yet there can be no question that the Popes want us to proceed by peaceful means and to avoid war. This does not mean "peace at any price" but it certainly means bolder and more constructive attitudes towards disarmament.[85]

Merton considered he was merely articulating the authority of the modern papacy that all Catholics were morally bound to obey, at least in theory. The problem with Merton's creative interpretation of papal pronouncements was that these did not have legal sanction and were open to interpretation by Catholic theologians, which had been the case with episcopal criticism of his pacifism.

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[84] Merton, *Turning Toward the World* (April 14, 1962), ed. Kramer, 215.
[85] Merton, "A Footnote to Christian Ethics and Nuclear War," in *Passion for Peace*, ed. Shannon, 64

In summary, Merton was alert to reputational risk he faced through his public statements. Merton's privileged position within the religious institution gave his writing a modicum of prestige within Catholic America that he was mindful to maintain. However, episcopal criticism by the *Catholic Standard* potentially endangered the future of Merton's writing commissions and he was aware of this danger to his reputation as a Catholic writer. It was in the light of this criticism that Merton began to reassess his priorities as being to bring his pacifist writings to completion for publication. He deflected any overt criticism of his pacifism as media misrepresentation of his opinions. Merton justified his withdrawal into his writing projects as being the most appropriate way he could serve the embryonic Catholic peace movement by writing in support of pacifism from within the religious system which was a position that gave him credibility.

Merton and Leó Szilárd

This section argues that Merton's moral absolutism worked against him in gaining support from nuclear physicist Leó Szilárd. Merton's advocacy for the abolishment of nuclear weapons went against the grain of Szilárd's more realistic political efforts to seek arms control. Merton was seeking to open dialogue with Szilárd. The significant fact was that Szilárd had begun to build the Council to Abolish War, a grassroots movement that sought to lobby for arms control.

Merton consciously adopted C.S. Lewis's neologism "post-Christian" to describe American Cold War culture.[86] This neologism encapsulated religious rhetoric as a *simulacrum* of the New Testament kingdom of God. Pacifism, for

[86] George Kilcourse, "Thomas Merton on the Challenge of the 'Post-Christian' World," *The Merton Journal,* 15, no.1 (Eastertide 2008): 18-29; Patricia Burton, "Introduction: The Book that Never Was," in *Peace in the Post-Christian Era,* xxviii-xxix.

Merton, was the only morally legitimate and religiously mature position in the nuclear era.[87] The reason for this was because war in the nuclear era could not guarantee the ideal of justice that the just war morality maintained. However, his position was a moral rather than a political one. On 4 March 1962, Merton informed James Laughlin that he was seeking to negotiate a publishing contract with Macmillan publishing in New York, with the prospect a "ten thousand dollar advance for a book on peace." [88] Merton speculated that America's obsession with nuclear preparedness was endangering society by provoking nuclear risk and this formed the argument of his planned manuscript on "Peace in the Post-Christian Era" for Macmillan publishers in New York.[89] The prospect of a commission from Macmillan publishing prompted Merton to decide not to respond to the *Catholic Standard* that could result in a clampdown by his superiors against the anthology for Laughlin's New Directions and also risk the promising offer from Macmillan in New York to publish Merton's pacifist essays.[90] In order to secure a publishing deal with Macmillan Merton needed to renegotiate his publishing contract with Farrar, Straus, and Cudahy. Merton wrote to Robert Giroux on 22 March 1962 informing him that Macmillan had offered a $10,000 advance for a short book on peace: "As I have other material practically ready, and better, and longer, for Farrar, Straus & Cudahy, I feel that there is no objection to my doing this book for Macmillan."[91] Merton's will was not enough to renegotiate the contract with Farrar, Straus, and Cudahy for

[87] Gordon Zahn, "Pacifism and the Just War," ed. Philip Murnion, *Catholics and Nuclear War. A Commentary on the Challenge of Peace: the U.S. Catholic Bishops' Pastoral Letter on War and Peace.* (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1983), 119-31.
[88] Merton, "Letter to James Laughlin" (March 4, 1962), in *Selected Letters*, ed. Cooper, 196.
[89] Merton, *Peace in the Post-Christian Era*, ed. Burton, 67.
[90] Merton, "Letter to James Laughlin," (March 16, 1962), in *Selected Letters*, ed. Cooper, 197-98.
[91] Merton, "Letter to Robert Giroux" (March 22, 1962), ed. Patrick Samway, *The Letters of Robert Giroux and Thomas Merton* (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 2015), 282.

$25,000 and he faced legal action for breach of contract if he signed with Macmillan publishers while under contract with Farrar, Straus & Cudahy. Merton's publishing on pacifism distracted from the focus of his publishing contracts on conventional spirituality that Merton had rejected as being pious religiosity because he was seeking relevance through a more socially engaged Gospel ethos that he thought he was communicating through his advocacy of nuclear pacifism as a means of avoiding nuclear risk.

Merton set out to open a correspondence with Leó Szilárd who was seeking a political solution for arms control. Szilárd had played a role in the development of the physics of the atomic bomb.[92] After the war he became morally conflicted by his involvement in the development of the atomic bombs dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki in 1945.[93]A minority within the scientific community wanted to forewarn the American public of the risks of nuclear technology. Edward Teller, father of the hydrogen bomb, castigated concerned scientists, principally, Leó Szilárd, Ralph Lapp and Linus Pauling, for being "fallout fear-mongers."[94] Szilárd was lobbying to limit nuclear arms, to give nuclear weapons to civilian control.[95] Politically, he was seeking stability through arms control. By seeing the task as one of technology management, Szilárd was rising above partisan moralising and focusing on the goal of nuclear non-use as the matter of central concern.

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[92]Lawrence Wittner, *One World or None: A History of the World Nuclear Disarmament Movement Through 1953*. The Struggle Against The Bomb, vol. 1 (Standford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1993), 8, 10-11 & 30. Eric Schlosser, *Command and Control: Nuclear Weapons, the Damascus Accident, and the Illusion of Safety*. (New York: Penguin, 2013), 37.

[93] Wittner, *One World or None*, 61.

[94] Edward Teller with Allen Brown, *The Legacy of Hiroshima* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday & Co., 1962), 181.

[95] Merton to Leó Szilárd, April 12, 1962, Section A: Correspondence, Thomas Merton Center, Bellarmine University, Louisville, KY; "Cold War Letter #68 to Leó Szilárd" (April 12, 1962), *Cold War Letters*, eds. Bochen and Shannon, 130.

Merton was conscious that religion and science had exchanged places in modernity and that science offered the security that religion once guaranteed. Moral philosophy, however, still conditioned intention for action and this was the dimension of Merton's concern for science in the service of religion. Merton initially wrote to Leó Szilárd, at the Hotel Dupont Plaza in Washington D.C. on 12 April 1962 seeking his expert direction on the risk of nuclear science so that he could use this information to support his consequentialist anti-nuclear argument.[96] Allan Forbes, Jr., a contributor to *Breakthrough to Peace*, put Merton in contact with Szilárd.[97] In 1962, Szilárd was advocating formation of a new grassroots peace lobby dedicated to disarmament. By April, he was advocating a no first-strike policy that was later supported by the Federation of American Scientists in early 1963. The Federation of American Scientists had been campaigning for a test-ban agreement between the great powers since 1960. Szilárd, more concerned with a need to work towards a Cold War political settlement, was temporality out of step with the movement he had helped initiate.[98] Washington policy-makers viewed Szilárd's access to the Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev, with suspicion of communist collusion expressed through his lobbying for peace.[99] Frustrated by negative attitudes from politicians, Szilárd founded the "Council for Abolishing War" as a grassroots lobby in 1962. Failure to capitalize on high profile independents, like Harvard historian Henry Stuart Hughes[100] who lost his Senate campaign to the

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[96] "Cold War Letter #68 to Leo Szilárd" (April 12, 1962), *Cold War Letters*, eds. Bochen and Shannon, 130-32.

[97] Allan Forbes Jr., "An Essay on the Arms Race," in *Breakthrough to Peace*, intro. Thomas Merton (New York: New Directions, 1962), 172-91; Merton, "Cold War Letter #72 to Allan Forbes Jr." (May 1962), in *Cold War Letters*, eds. Bochen and Shannon, 136.

[98] Wittner, *Resisting the Bomb*, 11, 51 & 256.

[99] Ibid, 373.

[100] "Hughes Grandson Joins Bay State Senate Race," *New York Times*, March 22, 1962, 24; "Top-Drawer Intellectuals in Hughes' Camp," *Boston Globe* May 11, 1962, 26; Edwin Lahey,

president's younger brother Edward Kennedy during the 1962 mid-term elections, forced the "Council for Abolishing War" to focus recruiting peace candidates from within Democratic and Republican parties rather than supporting independent candidates.[101] This movement, reconstituted as the "Council for a Livable World" proved to be the most enduring of the American peace lobbies.[102]

Merton was seeking the service of science for religion and praised Leó Szilárd for the "sanity" of his reasoning on nuclear ethics.[103] Merton wished to lend Szilárd his support because Allan Forbes, Jr., had recommended to Merton that Szilárd's proposals were the most intelligent and hopeful that have been made to that date.[104] Forbes, whose brother was secretary to the political campaign of Henry Stuart Hughes, had taken over administration of "Council for Abolishing War" in New England.[105] Merton, in his only letter to Szilárd, offered to support Szilárd's political lobbying by donating part of the royalties of his manuscript, "Peace in the Post-Christian Era," for which Merton had received a $10,000 advance from Macmillan publishers.[106] Merton pledged the remainder of his royalties to support the formation of a Catholic peace movement to be affiliated to English Pax, but which would contribute a distinctly Roman Catholic ethos to wider American lobbies working towards peace and disarmament.[107] Szilárd was seeking to align with fellow scientists. His reply to

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"Peacemonger: The Professor Is Unsettling The Minds of Some Voters," *Boston Globe*, October 18, 1962, 14; Edgar M. Mills, "Senate Aspirants in Massachusetts Woo Liberals: TV-Debates And Harmony," *Christian Science Monitor*, October 11, 1962, 13.

[101] Wittner, *Resisting the Bomb*, 263-64.

[102] Ibid.

[103] Merton, *Peace in the Post-Christian Era*, ed. Burton, 115.

[104] Allan Forbes Jr. to Merton, May 12, 1962, Section A: Correspondence, TMC.

[105] Ibid.

[106] Merton, "Letter to James Laughlin" (March 4, 1962), in *Selected Letters*, ed. Cooper, 183.

[107] Merton, "Cold War Letter #68 to Leó Szilárd (April 12, 1962)," in *Cold War Letters*, eds. Bochen and Shannon, 130.

Merton was courteous, but he did not consider collaborating with Merton.[108] He did, however, promise to keep Merton notified of his plan to secure signatures in opposition to the escalation in nuclear weapons, but expressed his doubts if the hurdle could be overcome to move from 2,000 to 20,000 pledges if the "Council to Abolish War" was to become an effective political lobby.[109] Merton had the credibility of *Breakthrough to Peace* on his mind when he was writing to Szilárd. This is evident in James Laughlin's reply to Merton in June 1962. Laughlin thanked Merton for passing on Szilárd's address in Washington, D.C. and assured Merton that he would "get him mobilized."[110] Any potential for co-operation between Merton and Szilárd had no further outcome.[111]

Merton supported Szilárd's goal in working for disarmament. What Merton aspired to was the abolishment of war, as he wrote:

> Szilárd's proposals assume, as do the papal pronouncements, that Communism itself must be resisted. They also admit, with the popes, that even tactical nuclear weapons may be used in this resistance:, but above all Leó Szilárd limits all use of force to a *clearly defensive action*, and *he completely outlaws all indiscriminate massive destruction of civilian populations* as Pius XII did in the most unmistakable terms. Finally, Szilárd's ultimate goal is disarmament and the abolition of war by international agreement, which Pius XII declared was a most serious obligation, binding on all, that would brook no further delay.[112]

The issue was whether nuclear war could be kept within controllable limits. However, Merton, here, conflated his own aspirations for the abolition of war with Szilárd's attempts to control the outbreak of a nuclear war.[113] This text, however, was from Merton's abandoned Macmillan manuscript and so it remained an uncontested opinion during Merton's lifetime.

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[108] Phillip Thompson, *Returning to Reality: Thomas Merton's Wisdom for a Technological Age* (Cambridge: Lutterworth Press, 2013), 30-31.
[109] Merton to Leó Szilárd, April 12, 1962, Section A: Correspondence, TMC.
[110] Merton to James Laughlin, June 5, 1962, Section A: Correspondence, TMC.
[111] Thompson, *Returning to Reality*, 32.
[112] Merton, *Peace in the Post-Christian Era*, ed. Burton, 120.
[113] Merton to Fr. J. Whitney Evans, June 13, 1962, Section A: Correspondence, TMC; Thompson, *Returning to Reality*, 31.

In summary, Catholic media criticism of Merton's mistrust of nuclear deterrence had not changed his opinions. If anything, criticism had made him more convinced that not only was he personally justifiable in his conscience position, but that his interpretation represented the authority of Catholic teaching. His commitment was to the ethics of intention that expressed his commitment to the deontological ethics of perfect duty in the sanction against killing as an expression of his belief in the absolute immorality of nuclear weapons. Strictly speaking, however, there could be no such thing as expedient deontology and so the choice between self-destruction and recourse to nuclear weapons, asserting these weapons' absolute immorality would amount to demanding that a nuclear-armed state choose self-destruction. This rigid fidelity to moral consistency may appeal to an abstract form of idealism, but it could not be expected to form the basis of responsible and pragmatic national policy.

Conclusion

Merton was writing to encourage Americans to resist the intrinsic hostility of nuclear weapons. His polemical position was that nonviolence was the only legitimate moral position for the Roman Catholic Church to follow in the nuclear era not only because of the risk posed to humanity by nuclear weapons, but also because of the existential risk nuclear weapons posed for the ideal of freedom that America espoused. The issue for pacifists was that nuclear deterrence was a doctrine that presumed an intrinsic hostility. However, the just war doctrine represented, in part, an attempt to take the Christian ethical command to love enemies seriously while also acknowledging the call to justice, order, and neighbour love as well. For pacifists, this was precisely what the presumption of

intrinsic hostility failed to acknowledge and it was for this reason that Merton's pacifist writings gained popularity within pacifist circles. Merton, however, went against the grain of Catholic teaching because legitimate national defence was not being questioned by the Catholic Church despite Merton's perception of nuclear weapons as purely offensive rather than defensive in nature.

Merton's opinion that *threatening* to use nuclear weapons ought to carry the same moral stigma as actually *using* them went beyond accepted Roman Catholic teaching. Merton, in his spirit of techno-scientific pessimism, imagined Catholic moralists as having been captured by the necessity for nuclear defence and he concluded that religious collusion with principalities and powers was a betrayal of the nonviolent Gospel message. Protecting innocent life, by force if necessary, was right for the same reason murder was wrong: because human life was sacred. Merton conflated his opinion with Catholic teaching and there were clear distinctions. It was true that Catholic theology regarded war as a sinful. However, it was also true that the Catholic Church regarded defensive war or armed self-defence as being justified. In essence, the object was not *taking* lives but *saving* lives, the lives of the innocent victims of aggression. Robust and credible deterrence required not just the intention to commit possible violence, but also the intention to inflict real violence on the enemy. Merton was unwilling to consider a viable strategic nuclear posture under any circumstance.

Fundamentally, it was Merton's publication interests on the topic of moral self-improvement, under the guise of pacifism, that motivated him to reconsider his involvement with grassroots activists. His friendship with James Forest motivated him to act as a sponsor to American Pax in November 1961 while also allowing his statements to be used by the Catholic Worker in the

Strike for Peace against U.S. resumption of atmospheric testing in February 1962. Merton's cloistered remove from society caused him to magnify the importance of his *Commonweal* article for himself and his correspondents as a means of demonstrating his public intervention as a manifestation of his good faith as a loyal American and faithful Catholic.

Episcopal criticism in the *Catholic Standard* potentially endangered the future of Merton's writing commissions. The lesson he learned was to be more prudent in how he communicated his writings to activists. In the light of this, he reassessed his priorities as bringing his pacifist writings to completion for Macmillan publishers. Merton's privileged position within the religious institution gave his writing a modicum of prestige within Catholic America that he was mindful to maintain. Merton justified his withdrawal into his writing projects as being the appropriate way he could best serve the Catholic peace movement by writing to transform religion from within. He had been chastened by public criticism of his views. In essence, criticism had made Merton more cautious, but it had not persuaded him to change his views, if anything, it had only resulted in his pacifist opinions becoming still further entrenched.

Chapter 5

Was Merton a Martyr for Conscience?

(18 April – 26 May 1962)

On 26 April 1962, Dom James Fox, handed Thomas Merton a letter from Dom Gabriel Sortais the Abbot General of the Trappist Order in Rome, dated 20 January 1962, requesting that Merton "stop all publication of anything on war."[1] At stake was the monastic dictum: *est monarchi plangentis et non docentis officium* ("It's the monk's calling to weep and not to teach").[2] Dom James, apparently, withheld this letter to give Merton time to finish *Peace in the Post-Christian Era* for Macmillan publishing.[3] It remained unpublished during Merton's lifetime. Merton confided to James Forest through correspondence his sense of hurt at being regarded by the Abbot General as bringing the monastic life into disrepute. Merton wrote: "Man. I would think that it might just possibly salvage a last shred of repute for an institution that many consider to be dead on its feet."[4] Merton resigned himself to his fate: "I am where I am. I have freely

[1] Merton, *Turning Toward the World* (April 27, 1962), ed. Victor Kramer (San Francisco CA: Harper Collins, 1997), 216.
[2] Lawrence Cunningham, *Thomas Merton and the Monastic Vision* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1999), 89.
[3] Merton, *Peace in the Post-Christian Era*, ed. Patricia Burton (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2006).
[4] Merton to James Forest, April 28, 1962, Section A: Correspondence, Thomas Merton Center, Bellarmine University, Louisville, KY, afterwards TMC, typed and mimeographed as Merton, "Cold War Letter #69 to Jim Forest" (April 28, 1962), in *Cold War Letters*, eds. Christine Bochen and William Shannon (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2006), 132-33.

chosen this state, and have freely chosen to stay in it when the question of a possible change arose."[5] Merton was reconstituting himself back into a regime of truth that constituted his monastic vocation.

This chapter argues that Merton was aware that he did not know enough about secular politics to overcome the ambiguities of his convictions, but he reconsidered his writings as his witness for conscience, even when his actions violated the principles of obedience required by his religious superiors. This chapter is orientated by tensions between Merton's sense of himself as a truth-teller or parrhesiastes, his risk-taking, and institutional constraints on his freedom as conditioned by the monastic ethos of obedience. It was Merton's presentation of himself as a parrhesiastes committed to the dignity of human life during the *Cold War Letters* project that contributed both to the validation and survival of his pacifist writings. The first section is a validation of the legitimate concerns of Merton's religious superiors by demonstrating Merton's political naivety that resulted in him accepting an invitation to draft a prayer for peace from a Congressman in Washington who was unknown to him. Merton did not take time to consider whether the use of his name would be an endorsement of the Congressman and could expose Merton and his religious community to public scrutiny. The second section is a further demonstration of the legitimate concerns of Merton's superiors by focusing on an exchange of views between Merton and Joseph Hill, published in *Commonweal* magazine, which exposed Merton to public scrutiny as it set in stark relief differences between his opinions on nuclear risk and that of an average American. This public exchange of views highlighted Merton as a parrhesiastes or someone who spoke his truth without considering

[5] Ibid, 134.

either risk to his reputation or the reputational risk to his institution. The third section switches emphasis from public debate to personal survival as it follows Merton's astuteness within his community as he responded to his censure by concentrating on the survival of his writings by means of private circulation within his correspondence network, none of which could not have been achieved without the tacit approval and support of Dom James Fox who acted as a buffer between Merton and the Abbot General in Rome.

In summary, the consistent issue that threaded through the year of the *Cold War Letters* was the difference of opinion between Merton and his religious superiors regarding the role of the Roman Catholic Church in secular modernity that came to its climax for Merton with his censure in April 1962. Nuclear pacifism merely acted as a foil that masked tensions between Merton's disavowal of a religiosity that he perceived had become disconnected from a social ethic and the institution that was seeking to maintain the *status quo*. Merton was motivated by a genuine sense of his pastoral responsibility to support peace activists by writing from within the religious institution that had granted him the privilege to be the Catholic writer he had become by 1962. Merton, however, did not have a mandate to write on nuclear war either for the Trappist Order or the Catholic Church. In the eyes of the Abbot General, Merton's appropriate role as a Trappist monk was to maintain faithful obedience to his monastic vocation by holding to his inner silence that denoted his removal from the affairs of the secular world. Merton's censure was not the silencing that he presented through correspondence and that is accepted by scholarship. The monk was expected to demonstrate free will in agreeing to be conducted by his superior who acted as an

abba or spiritual father-figure whose responsibility it was to seek the best interests of the monk.

Merton and Frank Kowalski

This section validates the legitimate concerns of Merton's religious superiors by demonstrating Merton's political naivety that resulted in him accepting an invitation to draft a prayer for peace from a Congressman in Washington who was unknown to him. Merton did not take time to consider whether the use of his name would endorse a message that could give the Congressman political capital and expose Merton and his religious community to public scrutiny.

The nuclear test-ban movement harnessed Hiroshima memory in 1962 as a rhetorical means to gain popular support against biological and environmental effects of nuclear fallout due to the resumption of atmospheric testing by the nuclear superpowers.[6] In the disarmament narrative the memory of the *hibakusha* or the victims of the Hiroshima atomic bombing was joined to the memory of the Japanese fisherman, Aikichi Kuboyama of the *Lucky Dragon* fishing vessel, who was reputedly the first recorded victim of fallout from hydrogen bomb atmospheric tests in 1954 in the Pacific proving grounds.[7] Merton was aware of the potency of Kuboyama's memory as an anti-nuclear symbol because he wrote to James Laughlin to acquire rights to reproduce Ben Shahn's paintings "The Saga of the Lucky Dragon," painted from 1960 to 1961, expressing Shahn's anti-nuclear visual statement.[8] Merton wrote: "It would be

[6] Ran Zwigenberg, *Hiroshima: The Origins of Global Memory Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014).
[7] Robert Jacobs, *The Dragon's Tail: Americans Face the Atomic Age* (Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 2010), 129, n. 27.
[8] Frances Pohl, *Ben Shahn*. (New York: Chameleon, 1993), 27.

wonderful to get some of Ben Shahn's 'Lucky Dragon' pictures and run them in the middle of [*Breakthrough to Peace*] somewhere, perhaps with a note to him. They are on exhibit at some gallery in New York and it ought to be easy to get reproductions and permission to use them."[9] Shahn's portrait of forty-year-old Kuboyama, included a bright red dragon whose head is surrounded by a fire wreath, a symbol signifying the destructive power of nuclear weaponry.[10] The dragon foreshadowed the unmerited demise of Kuboyama as the reputed seminal victim of radioactive fallout. Merton's initial decision to use Shahn's painting series for the *Breakthrough to Peace* anthology was motivated by his anthology's advocacy for nuclear disarmament.

President John F. Kennedy was reticent to engage with the test-ban movement, in part, because Soviet tests received less international criticism than had U.S. resumption due to public protests. Kennedy was under fire from the right-wing for his "defeatist" foreign policy and so was hesitant to embrace the anti-test movement in case it was misconstrued by the American public and Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev as being a sign of defeatism.[11] However, this did not prevent individual politicians taking the initiative for themselves. One such individual was Congressman Frank Kowalski, a Democratic representative for Connecticut whose electoral base was American-Polish Catholic and who was familiar with the name of Thomas Merton as a celebrity Catholic author whose acquaintance offered him an opportunity to harness the power of celebrity for his own political ambition to run for the Senate elections in 1962 as

[9] Thomas Merton, letter to James Laughlin, December 15, 1961 in *Selected Letters*, ed. David Cooper (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1997), 190.
[10] Susanna Brooks Gorski, "The Artist, the Atom, and the Bikini Atoll: Ralston Crawford Paints Operation Crossroads," unpublished MA thesis, (The University of Texas at Austin, 2010).
[11] Shane Maddock, *Nuclear Apartheid: The Quest for American Atomic Supremacy from World War II to the Present* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2010), 169.

an independent peace candidate.

Congressman Kowalski introduced himself through correspondence to Merton in a letter dated 11 April 1962 in which he informed Merton that he was committed to nuclear disarmament as a direct result of his experience of his service in Japan after the atomic bombings in 1945.[12] Kowalski informed Merton that he had been a military governor in Japan, "charged with helping the Japanese rebuild Hiroshima."[13] Kowalski was a former army colonel who had received from General Douglas MacArthur post-war postings as chief of military governments in Kyoto, Osaka, and the Chugoku region and deputy chief of the Civil Affairs Section, Supreme Commander Allied Powers, in Tokyo. Kowalski served during American occupation and reconstruction of Japan (1945-52).[14] Merton, in his *Cold War Letters*, portrayed Kowalski as bearing witness to the nuclear event.[15] Merton took Kowalski at face value. He knew nothing about the Congressman. This demonstrates Merton's lack of political curiosity, but also his astuteness for appropriating Kowalski's association with Hiroshima memory to justify the moral legitimacy of Merton's own nuclear pacifism within his correspondence circle.

Frank Kowalski took an interest in military affairs while in Congress.[16] Initially, he sided with Democrats calling for Republicans to close the "missile gap" between America and the Soviet Union during the late Eisenhower administration. During the 87th Congress, Kowalski served on the House

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[12] Frank Kowalski to Merton, April 11, 1962. Section A: Correspondence, TMC.
[13] Ibid.
[14] Hiroshi Masuda, *MacArthur in Asia: The General and His Staff in the Philippines, Japan, and Korea*, trans. Reiko Yamamoto (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2012), 254.
[15] Merton to Justus George Lawler, May 1962, Section A: Correspondence, TMC, typed and mimeographed as Merton, "Cold War Letter #70 to Justus George Lawler" (late April/ early May, 1962), in *Cold War Letters*, eds. Bochen and Shannon, 136; Merton, "Introduction," *Breakthrough to Peace: Twelve Views on the Threat of Thermonuclear Extermination* intro, Thomas Merton, (New York: New Directions, 1962), 9.
[16] Jean R. Hailey "Ex-Congressman Kowalski Dies," *Washington Post*, October 15, 1974, 8.

Committee on Armed Services as a result of his distinguished former military career.[17] By 1962, Kowalski was dissatisfied with how President Kennedy had handled the fallout shelter scare during 1961.[18] Kowalski was critical of the Kennedy administration's support for building private fallout shelters as being "immoral" and "dishonest" because he argued that such improvised shelters could not practically guarantee survival.[19] Kowalski's opinion was that President Kennedy had embarked on endorsing a policy of private shelter building that was inadequate and dishonest.[20] Congressional opponents of civil defence belonged to both parties, but supporters were disproportionately Democrats. Generally, prominent Congressional foes of civil defence such as Albert Thomas and Clarence Cannon were not known as advocates of reconciliation with the Soviet Union, or of reduced spending on offensive nuclear weapons.[21] Kowalski saw America's deterrent as dependent on a well-resourced U.S. military rather than a growing dependency on nuclear weapons. As a member of the manpower utilization sub-committee, he opposed wasting military manpower.[22] Kowalski supported the Kennedy administration's

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[17] Nicholas Masters, "Committee Assignments in the House of Representatives," *The American Political Science Review* 55, no. 2 (June 1961): 345-57.

[18] "Kowalski Favors Atom Test Halt," *Hartford Courant* (Connecticut), July 26, 1960, 11.

[19] "Kowalski: Shelters Impractical," *Hartford Courant*, November 22, 1961, 13.

[20] "U.S. Forces Seen Far Outnumbered," *Hartford Courant*, October 20, 1959, 10; Walter L. Galuszka, "Colonel Kowalski Needed as a Guide," *Hartford Courant*, November 1, 1958, 10; "Must Negotiate Peace, Says Rep. Kowalski," *Hartford Courant*, March 15, 1959, 8; "Johnson Sees Peril In 'Guess' on Reds: Senator Fears 'Rosy' System Of Intelligence," *Washington Post*, January 24, 1960, 1; "Kowalski Frets Over Sharing Atomic Arms," *Hartford Courant*, February 8, 1960, 4; "Kowalski Favors Atom Test Halt," *Hartford Courant*, July 26, 1960, 11; Daniel Schaefer, "Up Defense For Peace: Kowalski," *Hartford Courant*, October 8, 1960, 9; "Kowalski: Shelters Impractical," *Hartford Courant*, November 22, 1961, 13; Robert D Byrnes, "Washington Report: Hearing on Guard Reorganization Recessed for About Two Weeks," *Hartford Courant*, May 25, 1962, 2.

[21] Edward Geist, *Armageddon Insurance: Civil Defense in the United States and Soviet Union, 1945–1991* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2019), 164.

[22] Robert Byrnes, "Washington Report: Hearing on Guard Reorganization Recessed for About Two Weeks," *Hartford Courant*, May 25, 1962, 2.

proposals for gradual arms control as verified by inspections, rather than calling for unilateral disarmament.[23]

In April 1962, Congressman Kowalski had personal political motivations for seeking Merton's celebrity Catholic endorsement as he was looking to appeal to his Catholic Polish-American voter base for his own political ambitions as he planned to run for the Senate in the mid-term elections of 1962. Merton was primarily concerned with justifying his commission of a prayer requested by "a senator" Frank Kowalski in Merton's letter to the nuclear physicist Leó Szilárd on 12 April 1962 as "a symbolic gesture" for peace.[24] Szilárd publishing in the *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists* in April 1962 highlighted that there were politicians in Congress, but especially in the Senate, who privately had insight and showed concern regarding the threat of nuclear war, but who in public lacked "the courage of their convictions."[25] Merton was attempting to persuade Szilárd that his collaboration with Kowalski, the Washington "senator," was an example of Merton's *bona fides* as an advocate for nuclear disarmament.[26] Merton's erroneous title of senator for Frank Kowalski was not without irony because Kowalski was facing a political battle with Democratic Party bosses to secure a nomination. Kowalski's difficulties with Democratic party bosses arose from his personal ambition to run for the Senate against the wishes of the Democratic Party leadership. By April 1962, Kowalski had set himself against his former political patron, John M. Bailey in

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[23] *Blueprint for The Peace Race: Outline of Basic Provisions of a Treaty on General and Complete Disarmament in a Peaceful World*. United States Arms Control And Disarmament Agency Publication, 4, General Series 3 (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1962).

[24] Merton, "Cold War Letter #68 to Leó Szilárd" (April 12, 1962), in *Cold War Letters*, eds. Bochen and Shannon, 130.

[25] Leó Szilárd, "Are We on the Road to War?" *The Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists* 18, no. 4 (April 1962), 25.

[26] Ibid.

Connecticut, who had anointed Abraham Ribicoff, former member of Kennedy's cabinet, as Democratic candidate for the Senate.[27] President Kennedy, to deflect Kowalski, twice offered him a post at the newly formed Peace and Disarmament Agency, but Kowalski declined the offer because he regarded this poorly financed agency as merely a paper tiger for arms control and he was committed to run for the mid-term election having personally out-polled Kennedy in 1960.[28] Kowalski's popularity within the ethnically Catholic American-Polish community was considered by Democratic bosses as enough of a political threat for them if he committed to running as a peace candidate.

Congressman Frank Kowalski had won Merton's trust because he valued Merton's artistic reflection on the atomic bombing of Hiroshima, "Original Child Bomb."[29] In 1962, the prevailing view regarding the decision to use the atomic bomb was that it obviated the need for an invasion of Japan, accelerated the conclusion of the war, and saved a vast number of American lives.[30] By contrast, Merton composed "Original Child Bomb" as an anti-poem in 41 points or observations on the capacity for moral drift in total war. Point 40 reads:

> 40: As to the Original Child that was born,
> President Truman summed up the philosophy
> of the situation in a few words. "We found
> the bomb," he said, "and we used it."[31]

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[27] Marquis Childs, "A Test for JFK in Nutmeg State," *Washington Post*, July 11, 1962, 16

[28] Jack Zaiman, "Disarmament Post Offer To Kowalski Reported," *Hartford Courant*, August 22, 1962, 2; Jack Zaiman, "Famous Lost Causes: How They Happened," *Hartford Courant*, May 4, 1970, 26.

[29] Merton, "Original Child Bomb: Points for meditation to be scratched on the walls of a cave," *The Nonviolent Alternative*, ed. Gordon Zahn (New York: Farrar Straus & Giroux, 1980), 3-11; Robert Inchausti, *Thinking through Thomas Merton: Contemplation for Contemporary Times* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 2014), 67.

[30] Henry L. Stimson, "The Decision to Use the Atomic Bomb," *Harper's Magazine* (February 1947), 97-107; Samuel Eliot Morison, "Why Japan Surrendered," *The Atlantic* (October 1960), 41-47.

[31] Merton, "Original Child Bomb," Point 40, *The Nonviolent Alternative*, ed. Zahn, 11.

At stake for Merton was the corruption of spiritual language and the unmasking of euphemisms as a *simulacrum* or imitation of religious values and natural law principles consistent with Merton's commitment to the dignity of human life. The test range was named "Trinity" and the take-off point called "Papacy," but the logic of the operation was driven by technological determinism and governed by a military logic in which the ends justified the means. Merton's countercultural reading of the atomic bombing of Hiroshima went against American mainstream acceptance of Hiroshima as necessity to end the war and to save American lives.[32] The fact that Merton trusted Kowalski as based on the Congressman's valuing of Merton's Hiroshima poem reveals that Merton was susceptible to flattery for his work and that he was unaware, from within his correspondence circle, of just how countercultural was his pacifist position.

By 1962, atomic survivor memory had been internationally conscripted by anti-nuclear activists that reflected back to the Japanese their national uniqueness as the first victims of atomic bombing at the dawn of the nuclear age.[33] In post-war Japan, survivors of the atomic bombings, the *hibakusha*, were symbols of a painful national memory and were excluded in Japanese national consciousness.[34] Alternatively, in the West the *hibakusha* were co-opted by peace activists to galvanize anti-nuclear popular protest. This was most decidedly a radical opinion on the fringes of society that were not accepted by mainstream Americans who did not associate Hiroshima with the atrocity memory that radical pacifists were advocating at the margins of public debate.

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[32] Merton, *Peace in the Post-Christian Era*, ed. Burton, 58-67.
[33] Zwigenberg, *Hiroshima*, 176-207.
[34] John Dower, "The Bombed: Hiroshimas and Nagasakis in Japanese Memory," *Hiroshima in History and Memory*, ed. Michael Hogan (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 116-42; Yuki Miyamoto, "Rebirth in the Pure Land or God's Sacrificial Lambs? Religious Interpretations of the Atomic Bombings in Hiroshima and Nagasaki," *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies* 32, no. 1 (2005): 131-59.

At the time Merton received Congressman Kowalski's letter on 11 April 1962 he was treading a fine line between the institutional religious obedience his monastic vocation dictated and the personal responsibility to social action his conscience demanded. The prayer he drafted for Kowalski fuses religious faith and national patriotism. Merton's words followed Kowalski's directions by letter on 11 April 1962.[35] The prayer was Kowalski's idea, but Merton gave it words. The prayer's structure was composed of the following elements sketched out by Kowalski: the propitiator invokes God's grace on the nation, a time of crisis is acknowledged as a moment of decision-making in which the nation is called to judgement, the supplicant petitions God to grant wisdom to the leaders and people of the nation.[36] Merton closely followed Kowalski's directions.

The Congressional prayer was written by Merton within a week without the prior approval by Trappist censors. Kowalski, writing from Washington D.C., commissioned Merton to draft a prayer for peace on Wednesday 11 April 1962; the following Wednesday, 18 April, Kowalski had read it into the *Congressional Record*.[37] Kowalski had intended to call for a National Day of Prayer before U.S. atmosphere testing was resumed. Kowalski expected this either on 30 April or 1 May 1962.[38] National days of prayer in the United States have a tradition of symbolic association with the public life of the nation since the American Revolution where the speech act of prayer has been used to punctuate either national celebration or supplication in times of crisis.[39] Merton placed his conscience over institutional obedience to highlight his need to make

[35] Appendix 3: "A Prayer for Peace by Thomas Merton, Holy Week, 1962," *The Congressional Record*, Wednesday, April 18, 1962.
[36] Frank Kowalski to Merton, April 11, 1962. Section A: Correspondence, TMC.
[37] Merton, *Turning Toward the World* (April 26, 1962), ed. Kramer, 216.
[38] Frank Kowalski to Merton, April 11, 1962. Section A: Correspondence, TMC.
[39] Robert Bellah, "Civil Religion in America," *Daedalus* 96, no. 1 (1967): 1-21

a statement so as to respond to the urgency of a crisis moment as he perceived it.

Merton wrote the words of his peace prayer in good faith, but its reception had potential to be used as political capital for Kowalski who was seeking an endorsement from the National Committee for a Sane Nuclear Policy (SANE) to enable him to run as an independent peace candidate. The Congressional prayer employed a nuclear apocalyptic motif that had potential to appeal to SANE who had begun to raise American public consciousness of Hiroshima memory since 1960. Kowalski, in his prologue, quoted Merton: "The world is at the crossroad. Ahead lies either the atomic crucifixion of the human race or a resurrection of faith in God's presence in man."[40] Before U.S. atmospheric testing resumed, SANE hoped to gain public support for a cessation to testing in the atmosphere by tapping into popular fears of fallout. During the week Merton was drafting the Kowalski commission, 10 April to 18 April 1962, SANE ran three prominent advertisements in the *New York Times*. The second full page advertisement, published on 16 April 1962, proved the most popular. It pictured renowned paediatrician Dr. Benjamin Spock, standing with concern behind a school girl beneath the caption, "Dr. Spock is worried" on a page that included a letter from Spock expressing his concerns for public health in relation to fallout from nuclear testing. Spock, in the letter, urged citizens to recall that the government did not always make the correct decisions: "in a moral issue, I believe that every citizen has not only the right but the responsibility to make his own feelings known and felt."[41] Kowalski knew that his commissioning of

[40] Appendix 3: "A Prayer for Peace by Thomas Merton, Holy Week, 1962" *The Congressional Record*, Wednesday, April 18, 1962.
[41] "Dr. Spock is Worried," *New York Times*, April 16, 1962, 1.

Merton had potential to tap into this sudden eruption of anti-test activism.[42]

On 18 April 1962, a day before the American Congress broke for Easter recess, Congressman Kowalski read "a prayer for the preservation of mankind," written by Merton into the *Congressional Record*.[43] Its timing was symbolic because Easter, celebrated by Christians as a season of hope as a result of the Resurrection of Jesus Christ, coincided with peace marches across the United States against nuclear testing.[44] Kowalski rhetorically appealed for political prudence.[45] The pivotal supplication concluded the prayer as follows:

> Grant us prudence in proportion to our power, wisdom in proportion to our science, humaneness in proportion to our wealth and might, and bless our earnest will to help all races and peoples to travel in friendship with us along the road to justice, liberty, and lasting peace.[46]

Kowalski spoke the prayer at the conclusion of the ratification of the defence budget for the 1963 fiscal year. In the chamber were 78 members of the 371 required for a voting quorum as the matter for debate was a $320 million extension of the defence budget to develop the prototype of the RS-70 reconnaissance-strike aircraft.[47] The RS-70 was a reincarnation of the cancelled B-70 "Valkyrie" bomber project that the U.S. Air Force had championed as the bomber of the future. The RS-70 would, its adherents claimed, have a dual role

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[42] Ann Sherif, "Hiroshima/Nagasaki, civil rights and anti-war protest in Japan's Cold War," eds., Matthew Grant and Benjamin Ziemann, *Understanding the Imaginary War: Culture, Thought and Nuclear Conflict, 1945-90* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2016), 165-88.

[43] "A Prayer for Peace by Thomas Merton, Holy Week, 1962," *The Congressional Record*, 108, Part 5, (April 3-April 24, 1962), (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Publishing Office, 1962), 6399-400; *The Nonviolent Alternative*, ed. Zahn, 268-70; *Passion for Peace: Reflections on War and Nonviolence*, ed. William Shannon, (New York: Crossroad Publishing, 2006), 166-69; *Turning Toward the World* (April 26, 1962), ed. Kramer, 215-16.

[44] Lawrence Wittner, *Resisting the Bomb: A History of the World Nuclear Disarmament Movement, 1954-1970*. The Struggle Against the Bomb, vol. 2 (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1997), 259.

[45] *The Congressional Record* (April 18, 1962), 6937-38, 6399; Merton, letter to Justus George Lawler, April/May, 1962, Section A: Correspondence, TMC; Merton, "Cold War Letter #70 to Justus George Lawler" (end of April/early May 1962), in *Cold War Letters*, eds. Bochen and Shannon, 136.

[46] *The Congressional Record* (April 18, 1962), 6400.

[47] Ibid, 6903.

as a bomber and an observation aircraft. Its opponents argued that a bomber would be vulnerable to the Soviet missile threat.[48] Gordon Sander in 2017 argued that the debate provoked a "short-lived, but explosive constitutional crisis" when the chairman of the House Armed Services Committee, Carl Vinson, acting as proxy for U.S. Air Force Chief of Staff, General Curtis LeMay, and the manned bomber lobby, saw the aircraft as an ideal way to reassert Congress's role over the White House in determining the nation's defence posture. President Kennedy and Robert McNamara were struggling to convert U.S. defence to a less provocative and more cost-effective "counterforce" posture. If Vinson managed to force the Kennedy administration to finance the bomber, such a recalibration would be difficult. The "crisis" ended in March 1962 with Vinson conceding to President Kennedy that the House would merely authorise the expenditure of funds on the bomber. In return the Pentagon promised to reopen the issue for further study.[49] On the day Kowalski read Merton's prayer, the House was authorising expenditure, but the RS-70 remained cancelled as missile defence was a more cost-effective option than experimental Air Force bombers.

The peace prayer was nebulous enough to be evaluated either as a benediction of American moral exceptionalism or as an appeal to prudential judgement in the face of bellicose nationalism. Congressman Kowalski's "prayer for peace and disarmament" was published as a report in the *Hartford Courant* in Connecticut, Kowalski's constituency, on 19 April 1962.[50] The prayer called on God to bless the nation and guide its government and politicians in responsible action on the eve of the resumption of atmospheric testing. This was a broad

[48] Ibid
[49] Gordon Sander, "JFK's Forgotten Constitutional Crisis," *Politico* (May 29, 2017), November 19, 2021 https://www.politico.com/magazine/story/2017/05/29/jfk-xb-70-lemay-constitutional-crisis-215203/
[50] "Monk's Prayer Placed in the Congress Record," *Hartford Courant*, April 19, 1962, 19.

enough aspiration to carry a wide appeal and not to alienate readers who could be potential voters in Kowalski's independent campaign for a senate seat. The Congressional prayer's authorship was reported as written by Thomas Merton, nationally regarded as a celebrity Roman Catholic writer.[51] The brief report was juxtaposed with a story that United Technology Corporation, Hartford, a subsidiary of United Aircraft, had been awarded a United States Air Force contract to research solid propellant rocket motors for the Titan class, a dual-purpose rocket system in development for the space programme, underscoring the value of the military-industrial complex to the economy of Connecticut.[52]

Kowalski's second letter to Merton was his final correspondence. In his letter, Kowalski informed Merton that the tentative date for testing had been moved forward from 1 May to 25 April 1962 while Congress was in recess for Easter and so his hope for a National Day of Prayer would not come about as he had hoped. He concluded: "I thank you for the new and profound insights you have given me into the 'inner contradictions' from which our Nation suffers."[53] Kowalski informed Merton, in the same letter, that he had sent copies of the Congressional prayer to individuals in the peace movement, government officials, and news media. Again, Merton accepted Kowalski's correspondence at face value and in good faith without considering the reputational risk for either himself or his Trappist community.

Merton recycled the apocalyptic tropes from the Congressional peace prayer in his redeployment of Hiroshima memory when he wrote to Shinzo Hamai, the first popularly elected Mayor of Hiroshima who created the city's

[51] Patricia Burton, "Mass-Market Monk: Thomas Merton in the Paperback Revolution. Part I," *The Merton Seasonal* 39, no. 3 (Fall 2014): 3-13; Burton, "Mass-Market Monk: Thomas Merton in the Paperback Revolution. Part II," *The Merton Seasonal* 39, no. 4 (Winter 2014): 22-32.
[52] "UAC Unit Gets Rocket Contract," *Hartford Courant*, April 19, 1962, 19.
[53] Frank Kowalski to Merton, no date, Section A: Correspondence, TMC.

image as a city of peace. Merton, in his letter to Hamai, communicated his solidarity, through daily prayer, with the victims of the atomic bombings.[54] Merton's communitarian personalist perspective reiterated Merton's letter to Congressman Kowalski accompanying his Congressional prayer for peace in which Merton wrote: "I feel very close to the people of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. No day goes by without my explicitly praying for the victims of the bomb in my mass."[55] Merton's letter to the Mayor of Hiroshima expressed his mystical solidarity with the *hibakusha*. Merton subsequently included the Hamai letter in *Seeds of Destruction* as part of "Letters in a Time of Crisis."[56] Its publication coincided with Merton hosting the "Peacemakers Retreat" in mid-November 1964. This event was partially shaped by Merton's reflections on the humanistic implications of techno-scientific pessimism, as influenced by his reading of Jacques Ellul.[57] Memory of the atomic bombing of Hiroshima functioned as a palimpsest on which conflicting fears, expectations, and political agendas were imprinted.[58] For Kowalski, the nuclear apocalyptic tapped into the politics of nuclear fear, whereas for Merton the apocalyptic related to *metanoia* or conversion as an ongoing process in personal formation as a necessary requirement for social and political transformation.

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[54] Merton to Shinzo Hamai, August 9, 1962, Section A: Correspondence, TMC, typed and mimeographed as Merton, "Cold War Letter #98 to Shinzo Hamai" (August 9, 1962), in *Cold War Letters*, eds. Bochen and Shannon, 174.

[55] Merton, "Prayer for Peace," in *Passion for Peace*, ed. Shannon, 166-69.

[56] Merton, "Cold War Letter #98 to Shinzo Hamai" (August 9, 1962), in *Cold War Letters*, eds. Bochen and Shannon, 173-74; Merton re-edited "Cold War Letter #98" as "Letter #25" in "Letters in a Time of Crisis," in *Seeds of Destruction* (New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 1964), 295-97.

[57] Those in attendance at this retreat included: Philip Berrigan, Daniel Berrigan, John Oliver Nelson, A. J. Muste, James Forest, John Howard Yoder, Tom Cornell, W. H. Ferry, Tony Walsh, Robert Cunnane, John Peter Grady, and Elbert Jean see Gordon Oyer, *Pursuing the Spiritual Roots of Protest: Merton, Berrigan, Yoder, and Muste at the Gethsemani Abbey Peacemakers Retreat*. (Eugene, Oregon: Cascade, 2014); Jacques Ellul, *The Technological Society*, intro. Robert K. Merton, (New York: Vintage, 1964).

[58] Paul Boyer, "Exotic Resonances: Hiroshima in American Memory," *Diplomatic History* 19, no. 2 (1995): 297-318; Michael Hogan (ed.), *Hiroshima in History and Memory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

In summary, Merton's espousal of nuclear pacifism was drawing him into more risky political activity despite his efforts to exercise a degree of prudence through correspondence. The prayer Congressman Frank Kowalski read into the *Congressional Record* on 18 April 1962 infused religious faith and national patriotism with a political resonance.[59] It interceded for the nation and for common humanity on the eve of U.S. resumption of testing in the atmosphere.[60] Merton's words were nebulous enough to offer Kowalski political capital as he began his campaign for a senate seat. He rhetorically directed Merton's prayer for peace to attract his American-Polish constituents in Connecticut. Kowalski, working outside of the party system, needed the endorsement of the National Committee for a Sane Nuclear Policy (SANE). The text of the prayer was an expression of techno-scientific pessimism. Nuclear apocalyptic rhetoric resonated with SANE's national media campaign seeking to draw the attention of U.S. citizens to possible health risks of fallout as a consequence of the resumption of U.S. testing in the atmosphere. However, Merton also used Kowalski as a means to advance his own interests. Merton, in the *Cold War Letters*, represented Kowalski as "helped rebuild Hiroshima."[61] He associated Kowalski with the reconstruction of post-war Japan in order to legitimate the Congressman's authority to bear witness to the nuclear event and to Japanese survivors as human beings in their own right.[62] What is surprising is that Merton took Kowalski's correspondence at face value. This highlights both Merton's political naivety and the extent of his idealism.

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[59] Andrew Preston, *Sword of the Spirit, Shield of Faith: Religion in American War and Diplomacy* (New York, NY: Knopf, 2012), 619, n.11.
[60] Merton, "Prayer for Peace" in *Passion for Peace*, ed. Shannon, 166-69.
[61] Merton, "Cold War Letter #70 to Justus George Lawler" (end of April/early May 1962), eds. Bochen and Shannon, 136.
[62] Merton, "Introduction," *Breakthrough to Peace*, 9.

Merton and Joseph G. Hill

This section argues that the Merton-Hill letter exchange sets in stark relief differences between Merton's views and that of an average American. Hill was of the opinion that since nuclear weapons could never be uninvented then there was a need for nuclear deterrence to prevent their use. However, Merton was arguing that nuclear deterrence presumed an intrinsic hostility that did not guarantee non-use and amplified nuclear risk so that deterrence was inadequate at best, and dangerous at worst. This public exchange of views highlighted Merton as someone who spoke his truth, but who displayed a lack of prudence regarding personal reputational risk and risk to his community.

Merton's letter to the editors of *Commonweal* was printed as a response to his detractor Joseph G. Hill who dismissed Merton as falling prey to pacifist hysteria.[63] Hill was articulating a mainstream American view that it was in the best interests of national security to continue testing, since the vague threat of long-term effects of radiation did not compare with the threat of an actual nuclear war with the Soviet Union.[64] Americans were willing to resume atmospheric testing rather than risk overtures to disarmament without the guarantee of reciprocal agreements by the Soviet Union, but still deadlocked at the United Nations sponsored Eighteen Nation Committee on Disarmament at Geneva in Switzerland.[65] The Merton-Hill letter exchange, published in *Commonweal* on 20 April 1962, was a response to Merton's essay "Nuclear War and Christian Responsibility," published in *Commonweal* on 9 February 1962 that was a

[63] Editors, "An Exchange of Views, Nuclear War and Christian Responsibility," *Commonweal* (New York), April 20, 1962, 84-85.
[64] Roland, Végső, *The Naked Communist: Cold War Modernism and the Politics of Popular Culture* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2013), 77.
[65] Eugene Rosi, "Mass and Attentive Opinion on Nuclear Weapons Test and Fallout, 1954-1963," *The Public Opinion Quarterly* 29, no. 2 (Summer 1965): 280-97.

response to the fallout shelter scare in 1961 rather than the immediate resumption of testing.[66] The exchange set in stark relief differences between Merton's opinions on nuclear risk and that of an average American.

The editors of *Commonweal* published the Merton-Hill exchange as soundings on the positions of American Catholics on nuclear weapons. The letter exchange highlighted Merton's techno-scientific pessimism. Merton's first point was that a psychological transformation was required for breakthrough thinking to peace.[67] This was a consistent position with his monastic *ascesis* that focused on personal formation as a basis for social and political transformation. His proposition was that the United States was a nation that "depends on this war-effort" as based on a triad of factors: "almost total passivity" of Americans and many Catholics, an "irresponsibility on the moral level, plus the demonic activism in social, military and political life."[68] Merton asserted that "national reliance on this substantial source of income and profit hardly qualifies as Christian."[69] The implication was that the arms race had acquired a kind of systems logic in which the role of human agency had become subordinated to a narrow technological imperative, and where politics was increasingly being defined as choosing between either one weapon system or another. Merton was attempting to go beyond the limits of the discourse on the nature of the arms race, which relied on instrumental assumptions of nuclear "balance" and to examine a psychology of fear that maintained the rationale for the deterrent. Merton's proposition was both provocative and unsettling: he was asking readers

[66] Merton, "Nuclear War and Christian Responsibility," *Commonweal* (New York), February 9, 1962, 509-13.
[67] Merton, "Cold War Letter #49 to Editors, *Commonweal*" (March 1962), in *Cold War Letters*, eds. Bochen and Shannon, 100.
[68] Merton, "Nuclear War and Christian Responsibility," in *Passion for Peace*, ed. Shannon, 43.
[69] Ibid.

to take a longer and wider view, to examine the totality of processes and events to see where these were leading in terms of an anti-humanistic imaginary.

Merton next drew fire from Joseph Hill for doubting the strength and power of America's nuclear arsenal as a credible national defence. Hill, writing from Los Alamos in New Mexico, dismissed Merton as being both hysterical and misinformed. Hill wrote:

> Father Merton suggests, by way of a palliative, that we slow down weapons production. What, on earth, does the good Father think we have been doing for the past few years? When we said "moratorium," we meant it; when we spent years in Geneva "negotiating," we were serious, although conceivably too charitable, considering that the Russians felt free to violate the ban in the interim.[70]

Merton found Hill's retort "barely credible."[71] Merton responded, rhetorically: "Is he serious? What are fallout shelters supposed to be for? In my utter innocence, I have been supposing all this time that they had something to do with the by-products of a thermonuclear explosion."[72] Merton admitted that his "living in a monastery" was not "an ideal position to obtain up-to-date minute information about world events."[73] Merton was making the point that the federal government was lulling the public into a false sense of security by encouraging them to believe that individual and national survival was credible and possible.

Merton next highlighted the potential for nuclear risk if systems failed. Hill declared both pride and confidence in the Los Alamos nuclear scientists who had built the first atomic bomb and the majority of weapons in America's nuclear arsenal.[74] Merton responded that he was "glad to hear that Los Alamos is full of

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[70] Editors, "An Exchange of Views, Nuclear War and Christian Responsibility," *Commonweal*, April 20, 1962, 84.
[71] Merton, "Cold War Letter #49 to Editors, *Commonweal*" (March 1962), in *Cold War Letters*, eds. Bochen and Shannon, 99.
[72] Ibid.
[73] Ibid, 98.
[74] Editors, "An Exchange of Views, Nuclear War and Christian Responsibility," *Commonweal*, April 20, 1962, 84.

conscientious men who are doing a lot of 'clear and unemotional thinking' because they are going to have to do a great deal more of it in the future."[75] Merton did highlight the importance of personal responsibility for autonomous action in systems: "We may be rendered physically helpless by the consequences of judgments made in high places over which we have no control. But that does not mean we can or should give up our moral freedom or responsibility."[76] Merton's retort reflected his suspicion of the bureaucratic systems of the state.[77]

Merton advocated nuclear pacifism because, in his opinion, the principle of justice was at stake in modern warfare that could not theoretically adhere to the strict conditions of just war proportionality. As a consequence, a relative pacifist position was the only principle of justice, he concluded. [78] Merton highlighted for readers of *Commonweal* the potential for moral slippages in the conduct of total war. He rejected Joseph Hill's dismissal that "massive and indiscriminate destruction of targets was nothing new," for Merton, the implication of Hill's reasoning was that since massive destruction of targets had been permitted during World War II then a moral precedent had been established and "we can now do anything we like."[79] By contrast, Merton held to his absolutist position that massive and uninhibited use of nuclear weapons, either in attack or in retaliation, was contrary to Christian morality and could never be justly sanctioned. [80] Merton claimed not to be a "lone voice" on the matter of

[75] Merton, "Cold War Letter #49 to Editors, *Commonweal*" (March 1962), in *Cold War Letters*, eds. Bochen and Shannon, 99.
[76] Ibid.
[77] Mark Grief, *The Age of the Crisis of Man: Thought and Fiction in America, 1933–1973* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2015), 57.
[78] Ibid.
[79] Merton, "Cold War Letter #49 to Editors, *Commonweal*" (March 1962), in *Cold War Letters*, eds. Bochen and Shannon, 99.
[80] Merton, "Nuclear War and Christian Responsibility," in *Passion for Peace*, ed. Shannon, 43-44.

"moral irresponsibility" in his response to Joseph Hill.[81] Here, Merton appealed to the statements of the modern papacy that had begun to question the just war tradition's cardinal claim that war could foster justice.[82] By contrast, Catholic moralists argued that limited war could be created by intelligence and energy, under the direction of a moral imperative and to argue otherwise was to succumb to some sort of determinism in human affairs. The problem for these moralists was that papal statements did not enter the formidable technical problem, how this legal transcription of a moral principle was to be effected.[83] Merton's idealist opposition to Catholic moralists during the fallout shelter scare had caused him to mistrust American Catholic theologians whom he imagined were capable of justifying a limited nuclear war for military strategists.[84] Merton imagined Catholic moralists in the United States as undermining the messages of the popes by allowing the nation to sleepwalk into war. Merton failed to acknowledge that papal statements were not statements of infallibility and were open to interpretation by Catholic moralists.[85]

For Joseph Hill the only rational means for the United States to negotiate with the Soviet Union was from a position of military strength, which had to be especially maintained during negotiations.[86] Merton did not understand nuclear diplomacy. He doubted the credibility of "nuclear weapons for self-defense" because this could be used "in first-strike attack if it should be expedient."[87]

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[81] Ibid, 44.
[82] Peter Huff, "Saint Peter Sheathes His Sword: The Modern Papacy's Turn Toward Pacifism," *International Journal on World Peace* 25, no. 1 (2008): 32.
[83] John Courtney Murray, "Remarks on the Moral Problem of War," *Theological Studies* 20 (March 1959): 40-61.
[84] Merton, "Cold War Letter #26 to Wilbur Ferry" (January 30, 1962), in *Cold War Letters*, eds. Bochen and Shannon, 61.
[85] Ibid.
[86] Phillip Thompson, *Returning to Reality: Thomas Merton's Wisdom for a Technological World* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2013), 34.
[87] Merton, "Nuclear War and Christian Responsibility," in *Passion for Peace*, ed. Shannon, 39.

Merton, in his response to *Commonweal*, asked: "can anyone assert that the idea of the preemptive first strike is not taken seriously in America today? Can anyone deny that such a strike might easily lead to a war of massively destructive proportions?"[88] Merton discounted the positive value of nuclear weapons in structuring global political relations in the post-war world, as well as the ways in which threats to use nuclear weapons could be made by the U.S. to gain decided political or military advantage not only in crisis situations but also in the overall geopolitical context of the Cold War.

Merton had his supporters who were equally suspicious of the nuclear state. Justus George Lawler wrote to inform Merton, "I have just read the exchange in the Commonweal [regarding] your bomb article. It is more and apparent that the technicians are so close to the thing that they can't see it clearly."[89] Lawler praised Merton for his "passionate" and "prophetic utterance" that Lawler considered was badly needed, but there was little discussion of Merton's *Commonweal* article.[90] Lawler, an editor with Herder and Herder publishing house in New York and founding editor of the progressive Catholic magazine *Continuum*, attributed his nuclear pacifism to the dual influences of Thomas Merton and Daniel Berrigan. Lawler reflected that Merton and Berrigan exemplified a necessary socially engaged Catholicism that Lawler perceived as emerging from the Catholic laity, rather than from the Catholic hierarchy.[91]

Merton justified himself as a defender of the moral integrity of the Roman Catholic Church and Catholic values as he reacted against Catholic

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[88] Jerome Frank, *Sanity & Survival: Psychological Aspects of War and Peace* (New York: Vintage, 1967), 157.
[89] Justus George Lawler to Thomas Merton, April 16, 1962. Section A: Correspondence, TMC.
[90] Ibid.
[91] Justus George Lawler, "The Continuum Generation," *U.S. Catholic Historian* 4, no. 1 (1984): 84.

moralists in the United States as seeking to "preserve their reputations" by not speaking out against nuclear war.[92] He had castigated the moral "passivity" of so many Americans and the "active belligerency of some religious spokesmen" in relation to the morality of nuclear war was a "very grave" concern to him.[93] Merton's rhetorical appeal to papal authority was a foil masking his fear that Americans, including many Catholics, were prepared to support a strike on the Soviet Union, the assumption being that if the United States waited too long, the Soviet Union would launch its own strike.[94]

In summary, the significance of the exchange between Thomas Merton and Joseph Hill as played out through the pages of *Commonweal* magazine highlighted the essential differences between Merton's views and that of an American citizen. Hill was of the opinion that since nuclear weapons could never be uninvented then there was a need for nuclear deterrence to be used for national security so as to prevent their use. However, Merton was viewing the risk of nuclear deterrence from a moral purist perspective that presumed an intrinsic hostility so that deterrence was inadequate at best, and dangerous at worst. Merton's opinions not only reflected his misunderstanding of national defence, but also reflected his perception that Catholic moralists were not doing enough to speak out for nuclear disarmament. Merton was seeking a definitive ruling by the Roman Catholic Church against both the possession and use of nuclear weapons, but this was an unrealistic aspiration in the political climate.

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[92] Merton, *Conjectures of a Guilty Bystander* (1966; repr., New York: Image, 1989), 296-97.
[93] Merton, "Cold War #14 to Etta Gullick" (December 22, 1961), in *Cold War Letters*, eds. Bochen and Shannon, 37.
[94] Merton, "Peace: A Religious Responsibility," in *Breakthrough to Peace*, intro. Merton, 90-91.

Merton's Censure

This section shifts focus from Merton's public interventions and exchanges for the cause of pacifism in order to examine his forbearance within his monastic community as he responded to his censure by concentrating on the survival of his writings by means of private circulation within his correspondence network. Merton's actions were motivated by a genuine sense of his pastoral responsibility to support peace activists by writing from within the religious institution that had granted him the privilege to be the Catholic writer he had become. Merton could not have achieved this without the tacit approval of his immediate superior, Dom James Fox. This highlights that Merton did have a modicum of support for his pacifist opinions from within his religious community.

Roger Lipsey in 2015 evaluated Merton's writing life as set within the immediate context of his monastic institutional setting as Lipsey devoted his analysis to the relationship between Merton and Dom James Fox.[95] Dom James as Merton's *nemesis* has been an enduring caricature first expressed in Israel Shenker's obituary of Merton published in the *New York Times* on 11 December 1968.[96] This caricature was informed by Merton's own exaggerations of the juridical power of monastic obedience as a constraint on his freedom to write as his conscience demanded. Lipsey's study, however, represents Merton as adept at persuading his fellow religious of the legitimacy of his writings and actions within the institutional politics of the Trappist cloister that was one of the most

[95] Roger Lipsey, *Make Peace Before the Sun Goes Down*: *The Long Encounter of Thomas Merton and His Abbot, James Fox* (Boston, MA: Shambhala Publications, 2015).
[96] Israel Shenker, "Thomas Merton Is Dead at 53; Monk Wrote of Search for God," *New York Times*, 11 December 1968, 1 & 42.

austere religious communities in the Roman Catholic Church.[97] Lipsey, however, stresses the value of the benign support of Dom James enabling Merton to engage in drafting and distributing his writings from the year of the *Cold War Letters* despite tensions between Merton and monastic authorities.[98] A good example of this is that Dom James had received the Abbot General's letter in January 1962 that was addressed to Merton, but remained unopened in the abbot's office until Dom James passed it to Merton on 26 April 1962. Lipsey credibly suggests that Dom James gave Merton time to complete his book manuscript of *Peace in the Post-Christian Era*.[99] This demonstrated the abbot's duty of care, but it equally demonstrates Merton's ability to survive and thrive within the political hot house of a monastic community in which he was a senior officer as novice master responsible for the education of a future abbot, Dom Flavian Burns, who succeeded Dom James in 1968, which was also the year of Merton's death. Dom James did regard Merton's radical pacifism as being authentic with New Testament tradition.[100] Merton consciously constructed himself as a progressive Catholic voice.

While the United States was resuming atmospheric testing on 25 April 1962 Merton was introducing his novices to the early Christian traditions of pacifism. He noted in his journal: "Nuclear testing was resumed by the U.S. . . . I read to the novices in a conference a bit of the Peace ms. [*Peace in the Post-Christian Era*] – on Machiavelli – and Teller." Merton added: "Wednesday in Holy Week my prayer for peace was read in Congress. Congressman Kowalski

[97] Joseph Quinn Raab, "Relevance and Ambivalence: A Bibliographic Review of Thomas Merton's Centenary (2015)," *Merton Annual* 29 (2016): 225.
[98] Lipsey, *Make Peace Before the Sun Goes Down*, 176, 182-83.
[99] Ibid, 175-76.
[100] James Fox to Gabriel Sortais, January 9, 1962, Section A: Correspondence, TMC.

had asked for it. Reading Origen, *Contra Celsum*."[101] This was an early Christian apology for renunciation of violence in pre-Constantinian Christian practice.[102] Merton justified himself in his journal as a defender of the Christian tradition of pacifism. This was not how his actions were interpreted by his superiors. This point of contention had become a flashpoint between Merton and his superiors.

Dom Gabriel Sortais, the Abbot General of the Trappist Order, reminded both Dom James and Merton through correspondence of the necessity to obey the rules of censorship: "*Il ya là une question d'obéissance élémentaire*" (it is a question of essential obedience). Dom Gabriel had reviewed the third censor's report on "Target Equals City" and a note from Fr. Charles English in Georgia detailing that "Christian Ethics and Nuclear War" had been published in the *Catholic Worker* and *Jubilee* magazine without edits recommended by the censor. Dom Gabriel reminded Dom James of his letter dated February 12, 1962 that gave "l'Imprimi Potest" for "Christian Ethics and Nuclear War" only on the proviso that the author would adhere to the instructions of the censor.[103] Dom Gabriel was insisting that both he and the censors had the right to be respected through the monastic mandate of obedience. Merton's mimeograph copying and distributing of drafts of his essays did not technically contravene censorship rules because his mimeographs had a limited circulation and so were strictly not publications in the Trappist sense of publication as directed to a mass readership. American Trappist censors, however, did regard Merton's private circulation through mimeographs as deliberately disregarding their authority to sanction publication. Ironically, Fr. Charles English, the censor whom Dom James chose

[101] Merton, *Turning Toward the World* (April 26, 1962), ed. Kramer, 215-16.
[102] Merton, *Peace in the Post-Christian Era*, ed. Burton, 37.
[103] Dom Gabriel Sortais, O.C.S.O. to Dom James Fox, O.C.S.O., April 17, 1962, Section A: Correspondence, TMC.

to smooth Merton's articles to publication, indirectly effected Merton's censure through his negative report that reinforced Dom Gabriel's negative perception of Merton as lacking obedience, which was fundamental for the monastic life.

With the resumption of U.S. testing in the atmosphere national media reassured the American public that radioactive fallout could be contained thus avoiding a repeat of the shelter scare the previous year as well as discrediting the scaremongering of pacifists like SANE who were alerting Americans to the long-term health effects of radioactive testing within the biosphere. John W. Finney of the *New York Times* reassured American citizens that the resumption of U.S. atmospheric testing would not cause a major risk to the American public.[104] William MacDougall of the *Los Angeles Times* reassured citizens that U.S. atmospheric testing would be safer than the Soviet Union atmospheric tests in 1961.[105] Jerry T. Baulch, a reporter in the Washington bureau of the Associated Press, differentiated between long-term effects of the carcinogenic strontium-90 from Soviet atmospheric testing and short-term effects of iodine-131 from the United States *Dominic* tests in the Pacific proving grounds.[106] Atmospheric testing was a demonstration of a U.S. show of strength to match the Soviets.

On 26 April 1962, Merton faced allegations from his religious superiors that his writings on war falsified the message of monasticism. Dom James Fox, handed Merton a bunch of letters and reports, the main item being a letter from Dom Gabriel Sortais in Rome, dated 20 January 1962, in which Dom Gabriel

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[104] John Finney, "Dawn Shot Fired Device Is Dropped From A Plane Near Christmas Island," *New York Times*, April 26, 1962, 1 & 12.
[105] William MacDougall, "U.S. Launches Atomic Testing Over Pacific," *Los Angeles Times*, April 26, 1962, 1 & 6.
[106] Jerry Baulch, "New U.S. Test Series Opens With Sky-Drop: Middle-Range A-Device Fired In Pacific Area," *Times Herald*, April 26, 1962, 1.

personally requested that Merton "stop all publication of anything on war."[107] Dom Gabriel Sortais, Abbot General of the Trappist Order in Europe, had written directly to Merton's superior, Dom James Fox, to remind both the abbot and Merton that Merton was required, under monastic obedience, to obey the rules of Trappist censorship.[108] Dom James only passed the Abbot General's letter to Merton on 26 April 1962. Whether the actions of Dom James were intentional or not Merton had the time he needed to complete his book manuscript for Macmillan publishing.[109] Merton, however, was hurt that he was considered by Dom Gabriel as a monk who "falsifies the message of monasticism."[110] The question that hung in the air was whether Merton would be permitted to submit his book proposal as based on his pacifist writings to Macmillan publishers in New York. Dom James was inclined to let the book be censored, at least, then published if passed. However, the Trappist censors refused to receive any further articles from Merton on the topic of nuclear war.[111] Merton did not receive a formal censure, but he chose to interpret the Abbot General's request not to write further on nuclear war as being "silenced" for expressing his beliefs.[112]

Merton rushed off a response to the Abbot General on 28 April 1962 as a means to justify his position. Merton claimed that the American Trappist censor who condemned "Nuclear War and Christian Responsibility" and "Target Equals City" had interpreted his thought wrongly.[113] Merton affirmed that he was in "no way a pacifist" in the sense that the American Trappist censor had accused him.

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[107] Merton, *Turning Toward the World* (April 27, 1962), ed. Kramer, 216.
[108] Dom Gabriel Sortais, O.C.S.O. to Dom James Fox, O.C.S.O., April 17, 1962. Section A: Correspondence, TMC.
[109] Lipsey, *Make Peace Before the Sun Goes Down*, 175-76.
[110] Ibid.
[111] Ibid.
[112] Merton, *Turning Toward the World* (April 27, 1962), ed. Kramer, 216.
[113] Merton. "Letter to Dom Gabriel Sortais" (April 28, 1962), in *Thomas Merton: A Life In Letters*, eds. William Shannon and Christine Bochen (Oxford: Lion Hudson, 2009), 33.

Merton stressed to Dom Gabriel that he was merely stating that total war, massive nuclear destruction, was against Catholic moral doctrine: "It is what Pius XII says very clearly, as does even the theologians whom the censor quotes textually for two pages of his report without really seeing certain nuances."[114] Merton would only go so far in defending his position to Dom Gabriel because he was aware that the issue at stake was one of monastic obedience rather than Catholic moralism. Merton continued, "But it is useless to discuss these things with you. I do not want to discuss, I intend to obey quite simply."[115] Merton was aware that further protest against the primacy of obedience was futile: "I want to accept wholeheartedly, and with joy, the decision never to write anymore on war. Besides, this does not make me sad at all. This work is enormously difficult, quite repugnant, exhausting and unrewarding. To do nothing is very convenient, and I am relieved of it from that point of view." In essence, what was at stake for Merton was his reputation as a good monk, "I simply tell you the case, and if you want to stop it at this point, I would be very pleased. One has to finish somewhere all the same."[116] Merton's commitment to obedience was shot through with irony. He informed Dom Gabriel that when "Nuclear War and Christian Responsibility" had appeared in *Commonweal* in early February the Cardinal Archbishop Meyer of Chicago had copied ten sentences for his Lenten Pastoral copied exactly from Merton's *Commonweal* article, "which shows that the Cardinal was not altogether in accord with the Father Censor."[117] Merton reminded Dom Gabriel that English Trappist censors had less difficulty in accepting his articles protesting nuclear war than the American Trappist censors

[114] Ibid.
[115] Ibid.
[116] Ibid.
[117] Ibid, 34.

as Dominicans at Oxford University had accepted Merton's "Christian Action in Work Crisis" for publication in *Blackfriars* in June 1962.[118] Merton assured the Abbot General that he was committed to submitting to the directions of his superior even if it meant sacrificing his manuscript for Macmillan. Merton was freely reconstituting himself to the conduct of obedience as required by a good monk.

Essentially, Merton was motivated by interconnected aspects of personalism and techno-scientific pessimism as he considered that the strict application of justice, circumscribed by just war theory, was unattainable in the nuclear era because he feared that nuclear risk would lead to total war. Trappist censors evaluated Merton's absolutist position as dangerous to publish under the *aegis* of the American Trappists because it misinformed the public as to Catholic teaching on war. American Trappists were also sensitive to the ways in which Merton, as a voice of Catholic America, could misrepresent the loyalty of American Catholics, in general, and American Trappists, in particular, and so they conflated the religious and political concerns to prevent Merton publishing any further articles on nuclear war.

Merton's journal entry for 27 April 1962 had a new note of resignation and acceptance as he wrote to himself that he had been effectively "silenced" for writing against nuclear war by Dom Gabriel.[119] This entry is interesting because the twist in this tale was Merton's relief that the fundamental question concerning his obedience as to how he was to be conducted as a monk had resolved his dilemma as to how he should authentically speak out against nuclear war as a Catholic writer who was seeking to authentically engage with the

[118] Merton, "Christian Action in World Crisis," *Blackfriars* 43, no. 504 (June 1962): 256-68.
[119] Merton, *Turning Toward the World* (April 27, 1962), ed. Kramer, 216.

modern world. Merton wrote to James Laughlin on 28 April 1962 informing him of the Abbot General's decision to ban him from further writing on war as this "worldly concern" was considered by his superiors as "falsifying the monastic message."[120] Merton's letter to Laughlin was conflicted. He wrote that he refused the institutional image of contemplation. Despite this, however, he was exhausted from the skirmishes with the censors and his superiors as he wrote: "I have no desire to carry on a running campaign against every phase of the arms race. I have said enough for people to know exactly where I stand, and that is sufficient, monk or no monk."[121] Merton, with bitter irony, commented, "I note also that there are many other things that monks do which in fact bring the monastic state into disrepute but these are not questioned or reproved at all: they make money."[122] Merton had received a $10,000 advance from Macmillan publishers, which he wished to use to support Szilárd's political lobbying.[123] It was Gethsemani Abbey in Kentucky, rather than Merton himself, who had financial control over his publication advances and royalties. If the manuscript was not submitted to Macmillan publishers then the advance was returned. Financial realism as much as idealism motivated the abbot's wish for Merton's book to be submitted to the censors. If Merton was prohibited from publishing on war, private circulation through correspondence was still possible with the abbot's tacit support because mimeograph copies did not strictly constitute publication.

Beneath the surface of the disagreement between Merton and Dom Gabriel were their contrasting opinions of the identity and mission of the

[120] Merton, "Letter to James Laughlin" (April 28, 1962), in *Selected Letters*, ed. Cooper, 201.
[121] Ibid.
[122] Ibid.
[123] Merton, "Letter to James Laughlin" (March 4, 1962), in *Selected Letters*, ed. Cooper, 183.

Catholic Church and the role of the monastic vocation in the modern world that played out against the American Catholic shift from triumphalism to prudential judgement. For Merton, the monk was obliged to be amongst those most attentive to what was going on in the world at large and raise a prophetic voice during times of crisis.[124] The reality was that the monastic life had wedded itself to the market of the secular world, much to Merton's personal disapproval. This is best illustrated by the example of Tom McDonnell, editor of *The Merton Reader*, who sent Merton a clipping on monks building fallout shelters in the Trappist abbey of Our Lady of the Genesee in upstate New York. This community was noted for Monks' Bread, a specialist bakery, which was a commercial success. Merton noted in his journal, "It is sickening to think that my writing *against* nuclear war is regarded as scandalous, and this folly of building a shelter *for monks* is accepted without question as quite fitting. We no longer know what a monk is."[125] Monks building fallout shelters signified to Merton just how implicated modern monks had become in American capitalism and, indirectly, the military-industrial complex that defended the capitalist system that generated wealth.

Merton was fully aware that his writing was a quixotic exercise that was always doomed to failure and that it was only a matter of time before he was found out. The "blindfolded boxer" as Merton described himself had been knocked out in April 1962 just as he had expected in October 1961.[126] He intended to turn his defeat into a witness of the necessity for pacifists to be

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[124] Jim Forest, *The Root of War is Fear: Thomas Merton's Advice to Peacemakers* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2016), 55.
[125] Merton, *Turning Toward the World* (May 31, 1962), ed. Kramer, 222.
[126] Merton to Etta Gullick, October 25, 1961, Section A: Correspondence, TMC, typed and mimeographed as Merton, "Cold War Letter #1 to Etta Gullick" (October 25, 1961), in *Cold War Letters*, eds. Bochen and Shannon, 9; Lipsey, *Make Peace Before the Sun Goes Down*, 171, 177.

patient. He would obey his superiors and turn his silence into a symbol of forbearance for pacifists to imitate. Merton confided to James Forest his personal sense of hurt that the Abbot General had considered him as bringing the monastic life into disrepute by writing on nuclear war: "Man. I would think that it might just possibly salvage a last shred of repute for an institution that many consider to be dead on its feet."[127] Merton, however, informed Forest: "I am where I am. I have freely chosen this state, and have freely chosen to stay in it when the question of a possible change arose."[128] Given the emotion of Merton's critique of institutional Catholicism, his tone of resignation came as a surprise to Forest. Was there a place in monastic life to obey an unjust order? Few people in the peace movement, including Forest, could understand or appreciate obedience in such circumstances. A note of relief now entered Merton's correspondence in the wake of his censure as if confirming that the worst of his expectations had been fulfilled and that his reputation had survived. Merton now shifted attention to the survival of his pacifist writings as his superiors had freed him from decision-making through their demand for Merton to commit to obedience.

Merton had cautioned Forest during the General Strike for Peace in February 1962 against falling prey to the lure of fast results in the extended work that pacifism required to bring about transformation of attitudes. Merton's own pacifistic instinct was being put to its hardest personal test. Perhaps he perceived the fears of his superiors as the same fears that existed elsewhere in the world, the same fears that gave rise to violence and war. What would be the sense of calling others to patience in the effort of safeguarding life when he could not be

[127] Merton to James Forest, April 28, 1962, Section A: Correspondence, TMC, typed and mimeographed as Merton, "Cold War Letter #69 to Jim Forest" (April 28, 1962), in *Cold War Letters*, eds. Bochen and Shannon, 132-33.
[128] Ibid, 134.

patient with opponents, his brothers, within his community? The question for Merton was whose minds would be changed by his disobedience? In the wider public, those who agreed with Merton's out-of-step views on war would be confirmed in their views that the Catholic Church was an enemy of conscience, while many of those who disagreed would conclude that Merton, a disobedient monk, was being used as a communist dupe.[129] These legitimate concerns echoed in critical reviews of Merton's *Breakthrough to Peace*, published in September 1962. Should Merton and his colleagues persuade half of a nation as to the folly of deterrence, Henry Pachter argued, then these "amateur diplomats" would conjure up an even greater danger as the other half might precipitate a war to forestall its dispossession from power.[130] Pachter dismissed Merton and the contributors to *Breakthrough to Peace* as "prophets of doom" who as American "unilateralists" ignored the implications for the balance of power and risked bringing about the very "holocaust" they hoped to avoid.[131] Pachter concluded that Merton merely exhibited "ignorance of the real problem" rooted in a struggle between the superpowers.[132]

Merton imagined the potential for his controversial writings to have an afterlife. There was nothing to prevent his correspondents from circulating his writings within *their* networks. Merton wrote to James Laughlin on 28 April 1962, to inform him that, "there is no law against mimeographing things, and I do not think they would specially object to this."[133] Merton confided to Laughlin on 1 May 1962 that his contacts in the *Catholic Worker* newspaper had let him

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[129] Jim Forest, *The Root of War is Fear*, 58-59.
[130] Henry Pachter, "Amateur Diplomats and the Peace Literature," *Social Research* 30, no. 1 (Spring 1963): 95-107.
[131] Ibid, 107.
[132] Ibid.
[133] Merton, "Letter to James Laughlin" (April 28, 1962), in *Selected Letters*, ed. Cooper, 202.

down badly by "publishing things without his consent" and "without corrections the censors had asked for."[134] This had compromised his writing projects. On 29 April 1962, Merton wrote to James Forest cautioning him, "please do not under any circumstances publish anywhere anything I write to you on this subject or on non-violence etc. It will only make it impossible to do whatever still remains possible."[135] Forest replied to Merton on 15 May 1962 that he was saddened by the news that Merton could no longer write for publication. However, Forest was gratified that Merton had managed to deliver so much in a brief period of time that would stimulate Catholics and many others in the years ahead. Forest assured Merton that he intended to privately circulate his letters within the peace movement.[136] This marked the start of Forest telling and retelling Merton's story in the cause of Christian pacifism at the grassroots.

Merton consolidated his writings that were still possible to publish under the constraints that were imposed on him. What was still possible for Merton was to pass over editorial control of the *Breakthrough to Peace* anthology to James Laughlin at New Directions publishing in New York. Merton had persuaded Laughlin to remove his name as the book's editor because of Trappist censure. Laughlin wrote to Merton stating his view: "I'm sorry that we can't say 'edited by Thomas Merton' on the cover of 'Breakthrough to Peace', but if we can say 'Introduction by Thomas Merton' that will at least be a big help in the marketplace."[137] Ironically, this made little or no difference to the critics who associated the work with Merton. Professional scholars of diplomacy and foreign

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[134] Merton, "Letter to James Laughlin" (May 1, 1962), in *Selected Letters*, ed. Cooper, 204.
[135] Merton to James Forest, April 29, 1962, Section A: Correspondence, TMC, typed and mimeographed as Merton, "Cold War Letter #69 to James Forest" (April 29, 1962), in *Cold War Letters*, eds. Bochen and Shannon, 132.
[136] James Forest to Thomas Merton, May 15, 1962. Section A: Correspondence, TMC.
[137] James Laughlin to Thomas Merton, May 4, 1962. Section A: Correspondence, TMC.

policy negatively evaluated *Breakthrough to Peace* as having nothing practical to offer policy makers. Nathan Keyfitz, at the University of Toronto, did see a merit in *Breakthrough to Peace* in questioning, "the mentality of our age, its willingness to contemplate and plan total destruction" with its emphasis on human values "concerning the sacredness of the person the human race" in a world whose "realities are deterrence and counterforce."[138] Keyfitz, however, noted that the book "hardly contains the answers to the questions it raises."[139] Hedley Bull, a professor of International Relations in London, evaluated the book as a "protest towards the official Western policy of reliance on nuclear weapons" and the contributors made "superficial and arrogant assumptions" that anyone who was "unaware of the moral dimensions of the problem" was "a servant of some special interest."[140] The issue for critics was that Merton and his collaborators had failed to acknowledge the threat of Soviet aggression that had required a deterrence posture. In this case they articulated an irony of Cold War Western anti-nuclear protest in which citizens within the Free World used their freedom to put pressure on their own governments to move towards a more stable nuclear policy. By contrast, an enthusiastic review of Merton's work by Justus George Lawler was published in the first issue of *Continuum* magazine in 1963. Lawler was a correspondent of Merton and was sympathetic with his position. The review praised the book as "encouraging" by speaking with the "voice of sanity, and inasmuch as many of its contributors, who have either in the past or present been vilified as unpatriotic, naïve, or cowardly, continue to

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[138] Nathan Keyfitz, "Review of *Breakthrough to Peace*, Introduction by Thomas Merton (New York: New Directions, 1962)" *International Journal* 18, no. 2 (Spring 1963): 233.
[139] Ibid, 234.
[140] Hedley Bull, "Review of Breakthrough to Peace: Twelve Views on the Threat of Thermonuclear Extermination. Introduction by Thomas Merton. New York: New Directions. 1962," *International Affairs* 39, no. 3 (July 1963): 427-28.

plead, in effect, for the lives of their persecutors."[141] Lawler very much praised *Breakthrough to Peace* for its holistic thinking, but Keyfitz and Bull were critical of Merton moralising and oversimplifying the problem of nuclear weapons. Maintaining the *status quo* and, where necessary, strengthening it would give the West the best overall chance of continued peace and stability.

Merton had committed to New Directions marketing *Breakthrough to Peace* as peace literature. Henry Pachter in 1962 evaluated writers on the "diplomacy of peace" such as Erich Fromm, C. Wright Mills, and Charles Osgood as "amateur diplomats" who projected to the public their fears for the future of humanity as expressions of their "shame" at U.S. "wrong-doing abroad."[142] Merton conceived of Christianity as the matrix of modernity that reduced the Cold War to being a moral problem: "Christian leaders have actively joined in the Cold War and call on God Himself to justify the moral blindness and hubris of generals and industrialists, and to bless nuclear war as a holy and apocalyptic crusade."[143] Merton, here, viewed American Catholicism as unwilling to embrace open-ended possibilities of human relatedness. Henry Pachter in 1962 evaluated Merton as a "sectarian prophet who tolerates no argument."[144] Merton was, in Pachter's analysis, a "prophet of doom" who had chosen "to retire into the desert and be saved while the rest of us perish."[145] Critics dismissed Merton because they perceived nuclear deterrence in political terms and were not convinced by Merton's techno-scientific pessimism.

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[141] Justus George Lawler, "Balancing the Terror," *Continuum* 1 (Spring 1963): 104-05.
[142] Henry Pachter, "Amateur Diplomats and the Peace Literature," *Social Research* 30, no. 1 (Spring 1963): 98.
[143] Merton, "Christian Ethics and Nuclear War," in *Passion for Peace*, ed. Shannon, 58.
[144] Pachter, "Amateur Diplomats and the Peace Literature," 106.
[145] Ibid, 107.

The *Cold War Letters* had practical value and usefulness because Merton had access to a scattered pacifist network through correspondence. Using Merton as a contact, James Laughlin contacted Congressman Frank Kowalski to endorse his republishing of *Original Child Bomb* in 1962.[146] Laughlin informed Merton that Kowalski was having a hard time gaining support as an independent candidate: "papers are trying to smear him as a Commie. It's all so wicked."[147] Over the summer, Kowalski withdrew from running as an independent peace candidate as Norman Cousins, chairman of SANE, embattled in quelling fears of anti-communist infiltration, assisted Democrats by not endorsing Kowalski as a peace candidate.[148] Laughlin and Merton continued to support the cause of independent peace candidates by lending support to Henry Stuart Hughes, a Harvard historian, who ran for the United States Senate as an independent advocating nuclear disarmament.[149] Merton lent his support by contributing two manuscripts of his essay "A Letter to Pablo Antonio Cuadra concerning Giants" for the auction "Artists and Writers for Hughes" to raise money for his campaign. The essay had first been published in South America.[150] Merton had written it in the context of Soviet resumption of atmospheric testing in September 1961, evoking the prophet Ezekiel, to warn of dangers for Latin America becoming drawn into proxy conflicts by the nuclear superpowers.[151] Hughes wrote to thank Merton: "You had earlier sent me the mimeographed

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[146] James Laughlin to Thomas Merton, May 4, 1962. Section A: Correspondence, TMC.
[147] Ibid.
[148] Jack Zaiman, "Rep. Kowalski's Story Is Unique in State Politics," *Hartford Courant*, August 26, 1962, 3.
[149] Wolfgang Saxon, "H. Stuart Hughes, 83, Historian Defeated by Kennedy for Senate," *New York Times*, October 24, 1999, March 9, 2020, https://www.nytimes.com/1999/10/24/u/h-stuart-hughes-83-historian-defeated-by-kennedy-for-senate.html.
[150] Merton, "Carta a Pablo a. Cuadra con respecto a los gigantes," *Sur* (Buenos Aires) 275 (March-April 1962): 1-13.
[151] Merton, *Turning Toward the* World (September 19, 1961), ed. Kramer, 162.

book. Perhaps in the rush I forgot to thank you for it."[152] This was a mimeograph of the Macmillan manuscript that Merton had finished before censure. Hughes lost out to Edward Kennedy who won a seat in the Senate in 1962 that he retained for his political career. Hughes abandoned national politics.

James Laughlin, as Merton's publisher, worked to get Merton's writings into the hands of key people in the peace movement. Laughlin wrote to Merton requesting the contact details of Leó Szilárd who was promoting "Council for Abolishing War" to lobby for disarmament. Laughlin wrote to Merton:

> I was so glad to hear that you were in touch with Leo Szilard. I had read about what he was doing in the paper, but there was no address for him, and I hadn't been able to locate him. Could you let me have his address? We will want to coordinate with him, getting him interested in the peace anthology, and trying to learn the contact names of various peace groups around the country which he must be in touch with. We are going to make a very great effort to get the peace anthology into the hands of key people in all these peace groups that are springing up everywhere. We will be able to use it in large numbers for their good work. The difficulty is to locate them all, as there is no central bureau of that sort of thing.[153]

The "peace anthology" that Laughlin refers to was *Breakthrough to Peace*. Laughlin exemplifies one of a number of Merton's correspondents who valued his contacts for making connections within the scattered peace movement.

The Abbot General's final verdict on the fate of the Macmillan commission was decided by 12 May 1962. The primacy of obedience over conscience was at the root of the Abbot General's reply. Dom Gabriel acknowledged that it had been difficult for him to have refused Merton's right to express his opinion on the question of nuclear war. But Dom Gabriel enquired of

[152] Henry Stuart Hughes to Thomas Merton, November 23, 1962, Section A: Correspondence, TMC.
[153] James Laughlin to Thomas Merton, May 17, 1962. Section A: Correspondence, TMC.

Merton whether he best served the cause of peace by writing further or remaining silent.[154] Dom Gabriel reminded Merton:

> You understand that I do not ask you to take no interest in the fate of the world. But I believe you capable of influencing it through your prayer and your withdrawn life in God much more effectively than through your writings. And this is why I do not think I harm the cause you defend by asking you . . . to abstain here-after from writing on the subject of nuclear war, preparations for it, etc.[155]

Dom Gabriel restated his request for Merton not to write on *nuclear* war. While this does not appear to have been the silencing that Merton projected through his correspondences, nevertheless, the result was that Merton was required to obey the Abbot General's personal request. The vocational duty of a monk was to voluntarily obey his superior, but Merton also doubted whether he was following his authentic vocation by following his own interests. In this sense, Dom Gabriel's personal request to abstain from further writing on nuclear war was an opportunity for Merton to withdraw from public debate with dignity.

Merton noted that Dom Gabriel had asked him not to publish the book for Macmillan, the typing of which was finished on 26 May 1962, the day the command from Dom Gabriel arrived at Gethsemani Abbey. Merton noted in his journal: "a few people can read it in [manuscript] I have no difficulty accepting his clear decision and in a way it is a relief not to go on with this thankless struggle which few or none will appreciate."[156] Merton confided to James Laughlin that he had been betrayed by an "American Abbot" of the Trappists who had written to the Generalate in Rome.[157] The informer reported that a military intelligence officer had visited his monastery and had spoken with him "concerning Father Louis" who had published in the *Catholic Worker* under the

[154] Dom Gabriel Sortais, O.C.S.O., letter to Thomas Merton" (May 12, 1962), Lipsey, *Make Peace Before the Sun Goes Down*, 181.
[155] Ibid.
[156] Merton, *Turning Toward the World* (May 26, 1962), ed. Kramer, 221.
[157] Merton, "Letter to James Laughlin" (May 30, 1962), in *Selected Letters*, ed., Cooper, 207-08.

name "Thomas Merton." The informer reported that the name, "Thomas Merton" was almost synonymous in America with "Trappist." [158] The abbot informer acknowledged that many have benefited from Merton's "spiritual works," but that it was difficult to understand how Merton could express himself so strongly, as a cloistered monk, on questions as to whether the United States should test nuclear weapons and also the wisdom of building fallout shelters.[159] The Trappist informer alerted the Generalate that the *Catholic Worker* was a "Communist controlled" newspaper.[160] Merton wrote to James Forest: "You didn't know you were Communist controlled did you?"[161] Merton was amused by this whiff of suspicion, but Forest thought Merton was bending over backwards to please the Trappist censors. Merton was relieved that the religious order had made his decision for him. He had made sure that his pacifist writings would survive and this was what mattered to him as his mode of veridiction.

In summary, Merton used his censure as an opportunity to present himself as a martyr or witness for conscience within his correspondence circle. Merton's stridency, highlighting natural justice over national interest, less resembled a measured response than partisan fearmongering to his critics. Catholic moralists, however, balanced natural justice with national interest. Merton's pacifism adhered too narrowly to a single polemic that opposed both the possession as well as use of nuclear weapons. This was an absolutist position that contradicted accepted Catholic teaching on the legitimacy of national defence, even if that defence included nuclear weapons. Merton's conscience

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[158] Forest, *The Root of War is Fear*, 50.
[159] Ibid.
[160] Merton, *Turning Toward the World* (May 26, 1962), ed. Kramer, 221.
[161] Merton, "Letter to Jim Forest" (June 14, 1962), in *The Hidden Ground of Love: The Letters of Thomas Merton on Religious Experience and Social Concerns*, ed. William Shannon (New York, NY: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1985), 269; Forest, *The Root of War is Fear*, 59.

position manifested a cognitive and emotional dissonance that was unable to work towards an integral and morally defensible position on the problem of war in the nuclear era. Merton's superiors did not regard Merton as having a mandate to speak either for the Trappist Order or the Catholic Church and they perceived his role as one of faithful obedience to his monastic vocation of removal from the affairs of the world. Merton, however, had always been motivated in his writings by the theme of moral self-improvement. Trappist superiors, on the other hand, regarded Merton's opinions as a blatant misrepresentation of Catholic teaching and as being political precisely because of the subject-matter Merton had engaged with through writing. A difference between Merton and his superiors was based on their different perceptions of the role of monasticism in modernity.

Conclusion

Did Merton use his censure as an excuse to retreat from his involvement with radical pacifism that had become too political for him? Merton aligned himself with a new style of Vatican politics from 1961 to 1962 espoused by John XXIII who chose to soften rhetorical condemnation of communism to reduce the tension of the Cold War. This softening of language was unrepresentative of mainstream Catholic America. Merton did appeal to sectional interests within Catholic America as seen through his association with the Catholic Worker and liberal *Commonweal* Catholics. This highlights that Catholic America was not monolithic. The issue was how American Catholics could demonstrate their loyalty to the nation as well as their faithfulness as Catholics. Merton's witness was useful to progressive sections of Catholic America that still claimed to be anti-communist while also seeking alternatives to nuclear proliferation.

Merton's conscience struggle against institutional monastic authority only reinforced his consequentialist position. Merton's relative pacifism adhered too narrowly to a single standpoint of argument that was unable to find its way to an integral and morally defensible position on the problem of war. Merton's objective as both a writer and as a cloistered contemplative was to remind Americans of their need to uphold the Christian values he imagined that they espoused. His position did not square with the public imaginary of American Catholic authorities on moral theology who imagined communist domination as a greater evil than nuclear war. Since the issue of nuclear war was based on a weighing of evils and the proportion could hardly be infallibly decided, the theoretical question remained debatable. In the practical order, for the ordinary citizen, Catholic moral philosophy recommended obedience to legitimate civil authority, unless the command was certainly unjust; that in doubtful matters the presumption deferred to legitimate authority. Hence, to be a conscientious objector, a Catholic would have to believe not only in the pacifist side of the debate, but in the complete lack of solid probability in the Holy See and most Catholic moral theologians. American Catholic moralists balanced natural justice with national interest. Merton's strident argument, highlighting natural justice over national interest, less resembled a measured response to critics rather than partisan fearmongering.

Merton's writings from October 1961 to April 1962 manifested the subtle art of survival as he attempted to demonstrate a relevance for monasticism in the modern world that he considered was becoming an anachronistic way of living. It was for this reason that he presented himself through correspondence as a model

of religious forbearance in the spirit of the Rule of St. Benedict through his voluntary acceptance of his censure as a mark of obedience.

Merton's superiors viewed Merton's writing on nuclear war as too political because he questioned the morality of nuclear deterrence that was given a qualified acceptance within Roman Catholicism. Merton's pacifist writing was a convenient contemporary topic for him to recast his central message of personal formation for political transformation. This derived from his lived experience of monastic *ascesis*, but it did not equip him with the necessary perspectives to engage with the politics of pacifism.

A mystery remains, Dom James had received Dom Gabriel's first letter of prohibition in January 1962, but he chose to hold the letter from Merton until April 1962 when Merton had managed to complete the book commission for Macmillan.[162] One reason could have been that Dom James was financially motivated by the book commission. This, however, does not account for the fact that Dom James assisted Merton to exploit loopholes in censorship after his censure. This highlights subsidiarity at local level within Trappist community. Merton could not have disseminated his *samizdat* publications after his silencing without tacit support from his abbot, Dom James Fox who permitted Merton latitude within monastic structure as based on his freedom to express his conscience position, which was an American response to Catholic censorship.

Merton was conscious that he was writing on borrowed time. His primary concern had always been his own writings on pacifism rather than the politics of the peace movement. His alliances with radical pacifists had initially offered him

[162] Roger Lipsey, *Make Peace Before the Sun Goes Down: The Long Encounter of Thomas Merton and His Abbot, James Fox* (Boston, MA: Shambhal Publications, 2015), 183.

a platform in October 1961 to hold American Catholicism to account for its failure to debate the existential threat of nuclear weapons. By April 1962, Merton's alliances with radical pacifists threatened the survival of his writings. However, he had grown uncertain on how to authentically engage with the politics of pacifism. His acceptance of censure by his religious superiors was not a cynical ploy to ensure the survival of his writings. Ultimately, Merton made a decision to obey his superiors because he remained committed to his vocation.

Conclusion

Thomas Merton commented in his acceptance of the inaugural *Pax* Medal in 1963 from the Massachusetts Political Action for Peace that a monastery was not "a snail's shell" and that religious life was not "a spiritual fallout shelter" from which one could retreat from the affairs of the world.[1] It was Merton's pastoral care rather than his political action that the Massachusetts Political Action had recognised as supportive of nuclear pacifism by a writer from within a religious institution not then known for its support of nuclear pacifism.

This conclusion will evaluate Merton's engagement with pacifism during the year of the *Cold War Letters* as based on Catholic personalism and techno-scientific pessimism. Merton had written to Archbishop Roberts, S.J., in London in December 1961 to express his intention not to tinker "with the big machine" of politics.[2] Rather, Merton considered that Catholic theology "ought to stand above political issues" and he intended "to clarify the moral principles" for nuclear survival, as he confided to Msgr. John Tracy Ellis in February 1962.[3] Merton disavowed his former devotional writing through his avowal of pacifism in October 1961, but by April 1962 he had grown cautious and more ambivalent towards the politics of radical pacifists. The fallout shelter debate, discussed in

[1] Thomas Merton, "In Acceptance of the Pax Medal," in *The Nonviolent Alternative*, ed. Gordon Zahn (New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 1980), 257; Jim Forest, *The Root of War is Fear: Thomas Merton's Advice to Peacemakers.* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis, 2016), 93.
[2] Merton, "Cold War Letter #9 to Thomas Roberts" (December 1961), in *Cold War Letters*, eds. Christine Bochen and William Shannon (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis, 2006), 26.
[3] Merton "Cold War Letter #29 to John Tracy Ellis" (February 4, 1962), in *Cold War Letters*, eds. Bochen and Shannon, 67.

the first chapter, was the event that exposed Merton to a tension between moral absolutes and political contingencies that he transformed through writing into a meditation on the true nature of freedom as no longer being beholden to the expectations of others. This was informed by the self-disciplining of his monastic *ascesis*. Merton was focused on the continuous reformulation of the self and transformation of his own subjectivity as a model for readers to put into practice for themselves in their own lives.

Merton displayed in writing his conviction that American faith in nuclear weaponry was idolatry. However, Merton as nuclear pacifist and would-be prophet was on shaky ground. His line of argument was that it is morally impermissible to do evil that good may come of it. According to this argument, it is evil for a nation to intend the massacre of civilians either for its own preservation or in retaliation. However, one might reasonably doubt whether it was really appropriate to describe the choice to use nuclear deterrence so as to avoid being annihilated or subjugated by a foreign power as a choice to do evil that good may come of it.[4] Nuclear deterrence was less evil than annihilation or subjugation.

This study examined why Merton held the views he did. The narrative ground of the five chapters has made explicit the tensions between values and actions as important for evaluating Merton's year of the *Cold War Letters* because this was a sustained writing project that was concerned with pacifism as an ethical formation of the subject rather than as a political project. Merton's censure, preventing him explicitly writing on war, only lasted from 1962 to 1964, but he never returned to the topic of nuclear war because other social issues

[4] Bernard G. Prusak, "The Paradoxes of Deterrence: How the debate about nuclear weapons has evolved," *Commonweal* (March 2021), October 31, 2021, https://www.commonwealmagazine.org/paradoxes-deterrence.

consumed his interests such as the question of racial justice in the United States and conscientious objection as a legitimate ethical option during the Vietnam War.[5] The significance of Merton's pacifist writing project from the year of the *Cold War Letters* was that it formed the ground for how Merton came to be perceived as a social critic by writers of the Catholic New Left who shaped perceptions of Merton as peacemaker.

Merton's pacifism is still taken at face value and this has implications for how Merton continues to be read by historians as being a progressive Catholic writer who was politically engaged with a form of political theology that employed the language of conversion to describe personal formation as a necessary requirement for social and political transformation. A review of the literature on perceptions of Merton's pacifism, introducing this study, identified Gordon C. Zahn, a sociologist and a Catholic peace activist, as having played a decisive role in shaping perceptions of Merton as a writer who made pacifism more palatable to Catholics. Zahn associated Merton's truth-telling and mode of living as a form of militant life to demonstrate ways of thinking through new approaches to the Christian life as opportunities for peace-making.[6] This is the debt that Zahn's writing on Merton has bequeathed to historians. Zahn's image of Merton as a martyr for Christian pacifism following his censure in April 1962 has its origins in Merton's own construction of himself during the year of the *Cold War Letters* that has been evaluated throughout the five chapters of this study. Zahn, by remembering Merton's forbearance, was recalling his own forbearance in the context of his tense relationships with the American

[5] James Cronin, "Burn His Books: American Catholic Opposition to Thomas Merton in 1968," *Merton Journal* 25, no. 2 (Advent 2018): 16-25.
[6] Gordon Zahn, "Original Child Monk: An Appreciation," Thomas Merton, *The Nonviolent Alternative*, ed. Gordon Zahn (New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 1980), xxxix.

episcopacy as a consequence of his public commitments to nuclear pacifism while also seeking to remain faithful to Roman Catholic tradition as a co-founder of the U.S. branch of the international peace organisation Pax Christi.[7] The endurance of Zahn's representation of Merton as bearing witness to Christian pacifism within institutional Catholicism is detectable in how Roger Lipsey in 2015 presented Merton during the year of the *Cold War Letters* as an American Catholic writer who anticipated the teaching mission of Pope John XXIII in *Pacem in Terris* in 1963 as placing justice at the forefront of a nuclear disarmament narrative.[8] Merton was committed to the dignity of human life as witnessed through his absolutist rejection of all modern war, not just nuclear war, as being intrinsically immoral based on his belief that modern war could not meet the proportionality test of just war criteria. Merton did question the morality of the motives and the means of modern warfare, but his views were not systematically developed and were derivative of the English Catholic New Left.

In the United States, the fallout shelter scare was the unintended consequence of President Kennedy's weak messaging regarding nuclear preparedness in the context of a year of crisis in 1961 over Berlin. The survival narrative co-opted the American ideals of the family and the neighbourhood and it was within this context that religious commentators joined the national conversation on the morality of survival in the event of a nuclear strike. The self-help rhetoric of nuclear survival rhetorically expressed freedom as the duty of Americans to build their own fallout shelters to safeguard their personal freedom and by extension the freedom of the nation as a reaction to the Soviet incursions

[7] Benjamin Peters, "'A Completely Fresh Reappraisal of War': Americanism, Radicalism, and the Catholic Pacifism of Gordon Zahn," *American Catholic Studies* 128, no. 4 (Winter 2017): 1-27.

[8] Roger Lipsey, *Make Peace Before the Sun Goes Down*: *The Long Encounter of Thomas Merton and His Abbot, James Fox* (Boston, MA: Shambhala Publications, 2015), 182.

in Berlin during 1961. Religious commentators acknowledged that national leaders did not have the prerogative to subordinate the goal of protecting those under their authority against foreign threats to other goals if doing so would threaten national survival. To do so would be to abdicate their most basic leadership responsibilities of protecting national survival in a dangerous international system. It was for this reason that religious leaders called for the U.S. government to provide community fallout shelters and dismissed home fallout shelters as an inadequate response to any future nuclear threat. Merton was becoming aware of the difficulty of applying moral absolutes as a benchmark for individuals to assume personal responsibility. This was at odds with Merton's absolutist stance and he was unwilling to compromise his views.

Merton presented himself through his correspondence as a Catholic spokesman highlighting a consistent commitment to the dignity of human life that was not subject to negotiation. His ethical absolutism marked his contribution to a disarmament narrative that was promoting recognition of the inherent risks to humanity posed by nuclear weapons, and the consequent need for transforming international relations to enable their elimination. However, his views, based on the radical fringe, went against the mainstream of American Catholics who were never a strong institutional presence in anti-war movements. The responsibility of the United States in issues of war and peace would be one of the last issues which Catholic reformers chose to confront.[9]

Roman Catholicism accepted nuclear deterrence as a qualified means of preventing war and for maintaining the international peace throughout the Cold War. However, the Roman Catholic Church never considered deterrence as being

[9] William Au, "American Catholics and the Dilemma of War 1960-1980." *U.S Catholic Historian* 4, no. 1 (1984): 49-79.

an end in itself, but rather as a stage to eventual nuclear disarmament. Merton went much further than Catholic teaching by opposing all nuclear weapons as being offensive in nature and so the intention to deter through a deterrence doctrine was deemed by Merton as immoral and as escalating the potential for nuclear risk. This was a slippery slope fallacy that was born from Merton's sense of the moral righteousness of his argument, but was compounded by the lack of information available to him as a cloistered monk. Merton conflated his views with that of the Catholic Church. By contrast, John XXIII continued to uphold the traditional acceptance of self-defence as a just cause for war. This position did not change the qualified acceptance by the Roman Catholic Church of nuclear deterrence throughout the Cold War.

At the heart of this study of Merton as a reluctant political pacifist has been a tension between Merton's sense of himself as both monk and writer. Merton, as a cloistered monk, had voluntarily chosen to cease participating in mainstream American culture by committing to a contrasting form of community that was the very antithesis of the political issues he chose to confront. Merton negatively perceived the problem of nuclear weapons through the perspective of hard technological determinism and he tempered this with Thomistic "*dignitas*" asserting that human beings have worth irrespective of any utilitarian value they may play. This theme has been evaluated in chapter three as framing Merton's pacifist polemic as predicated on difficulties of individuals in assuming personal responsibility within distributed systems that Merton rhetorically reduced to placing a premium on technical solutions and efficiency for the maintenance of greater security under the guise of preserving freedom. Merton's polemic was not directed at U.S. foreign policy, as such, but rather focused on his

dissatisfaction with Catholic acceptance of nuclear deterrence as escalating nuclear risk. Again, Merton's thinking was conditioned by the slippery slope fallacy regarding shelter provision as a stage in preparations for war, which was a polemic that Merton derived from the radical pacifism of the Catholic Worker movement and specifically his correspondence with James Forest who played a central role during the year of the *Cold War Letters* by introducing Merton to transatlantic pacifist networks. It is no exaggeration to conclude that Merton would have been ineffective in building up his pacifist contacts without the assistance of James Forest at the Catholic Worker. Merton, in turn, had his status as a celebrity Catholic writer to trade with Forest. Merton's celebrity status was attractive to his interlocutors who sought him out to advance the interests of peace as they defined as both idealism and as serving their own interests.

The *Cold War Letters* may seem to be little more than a quixotic project when placed in its historical context. However, it is a microhistory in mid-twentieth century Catholic engagements with modernity. It thinly veiled Merton's primary concern with reclaiming his relevance as a Catholic writer that blinded him to the political implications of his adherence to radical pacifism as being a potential reputational risk both for himself and his religious order. The perceived choices were not the uneasy security afforded by deterrence versus a world in which nuclear weapons did not exist and nations were at peace. The management of nuclear technology towards the end of non-use did echo the tension of the system in which it was obtained: deterrence, as a strategic architecture, was held up by the dynamic balance between opposing parties.

Merton's perception of the role of a monk integrating both religion and politics was justifiable as based on his understanding of universal personhood as

the metaphysical manifestation of individual existence. The monk was both a person and an individual who participated in a similar material reality to other individuals and was also subject to nuclear risk. Merton's stance was interpreted differently by his interlocutors, but was primarily conditioned by their perception of him as a Catholic writer. Ethel Kennedy's correspondence with Merton regarded the role of a Catholic monk as purely spiritual, discussed in chapter two. This was the conventional view of Merton's engagement with secular concerns. However, Congressman Frank Kowalski commissioned Merton to write a prayer for peace that brought the monk into a political sphere, discussed in chapter five. The dissonance between Merton's espoused beliefs and his actions was motivated by a personalist rather than ecclesiastical conscience and he was unable to appeal to mainstream Americans. Merton used his privilege as a writer who was also a monk as his justification to challenge Catholicism for its failure in moral leadership to question the existential threat of nuclear war, which was laudable, but impractical at this juncture of the Cold War. Merton's appropriation of the Russian writer Boris Pasternak as his model for engagement with secularism during the year of the *Cold War Letters*, discussed in chapter one, blinded Merton to the mutual lack of trust between the United States and the Soviet Union that was required for the transformation of the international system towards disarmament. Merton's misrepresentation of Catholic authority as blanket obedience to moral authority and his political naivety were the themes highlighted by Merton's critics, discussed in chapter five. However, Merton was resistant to changing his views because he believed in the moral legitimacy of his position as a commitment to the dignity of human life. Instead, Merton chose to focus on the formation of personal conscience for prudential judgement.

Catholic moralists accepted security through deterrence; Merton was adhering to an aspirational Catholic position that was seeking security through disarmament. Merton's Catholicity was Carolingian in the sense that before he practiced his philosophy he already knew the truth; it was declared by the Catholic faith.[10] Merton's commitment to the dignity of human life was against the moral deformation of the sacredness of personhood and was not reducible to concern only for the security of the individual. Merton, however, blatantly conflated ecclesiastical and personalist conscience positions by assuring his correspondents that his views represented authoritative Catholic teaching. Merton's blunt position was that the strict application of just war in the nuclear era was unworkable because it was difficult to keep war limited and he feared nuclear weapons would inevitably lead to total war. Merton's opposition to nuclear deterrence, based on his appropriation of the writings of Catholics of the New Left in England, decidedly placed his opinion at odds with American religious commentators and professional theologians who rejected nuclear pacifism because the *magisterium* of the Catholic Church had not laid down that possession of nuclear weapons was immoral and so was legitimate in the case of national security. The opinion of the Stein symposium group was a radical position that was not accepted by the British Catholic hierarchy. Merton, however, embraced the applied ethics of the Stein symposium group in England as capable of integrating faith and reason within his sense of Catholic tradition by way of both mystical and intellectual strands of thought in the service of imagining a cosmopolitan Catholic culture. The incompatibilities between faith and reason was that the moral judgement on the intention behind the possession

[10] Monica Furlong, *Merton: A Biography* (1980; repr., London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1985), 252-69.

of nuclear weapons was inseparable from an evaluation of the reasonably predictable outcomes of diverse policy choices. The question for moral judgement was whether concrete strategic options could make the world more secure from nuclear disaster or less so.

The Roman Catholic Church did not look immediately to the abolition of war. This institution's doctrine was still seeking to fulfil its triple traditional function: to condemn war as evil, to limit the evils that war entailed, and to humanise its conduct as far as was possible. Trappist censors evaluated Merton's strident position as dangerous to publish under the *aegis* of American Trappists because it had the potential to misinform the public of Catholic teaching on the issue of nuclear weapons. American Catholic moralists had to balance national interest with natural justice. Merton's strident argument, highlighting natural justice over national interest, less resembled a measured response than fearmongering despite the fact that Merton's primary concern for his own writings resulted in him reconsidering his involvement with grassroots activists from February 1962. Merton's association with radical pacifists had always been marginal and had only consisted of him lending his name to support movements, like American Pax in November 1961, and allowing his statements to be used for peace activism, such as in the Strike for Peace in February 1962. Merton believed that it was the responsibility of faith-based Americans, but Catholics in particular, to model responsible citizenship for fellow American citizens, which indicates that Merton was beginning to shift from Catholic triumphalism to prudential judgement. However, his commitment to the dignity of human life weighted in favour of moral absolutism and this should be understood as emerging from his lived experience as a cloistered monk. Despite the fact that

Merton perceived his writings as reflecting on the morality of being both a Catholic and a citizen, nevertheless, his misperception of the risk of nuclear deterrence was largely the voice of a cultural outsider who was primarily motivated by his sense of the monk as a truth-teller to religious authority within the tradition of Christianity.

The *Cold War Letters* project was a performance of confessional writing that engaged with a truly radical politics of personal conversion. For Merton, the transformative power of freedom was not to be found in external ideologies, but in personal formation as the basis for social transformation. Merton's message was an appeal to activists to persevere in the slow work required for personal formation as a necessary requirement for social and political transformation Merton's emphasis was on conversion of the self.

Merton's idealism foregrounded his political naivety that made him oblivious to the fact that the private circulation of his writings as mimeographs exposed him to the danger of being manipulated by unscrupulous correspondents for their own political ends. Merton's correspondence circle reinforced his perception of nuclear preparedness as preparations for war. Wilbur Ferry and James Laughlin reinforced Merton's techno-scientific pessimism and this led Merton to conclude that American Catholics were oblivious to the reality of the situation. Nuclear warfare, in Catholic moral theory, violated two of the most important requirements of "justice" according to the just war doctrine: first, the principle of proportionality between the destruction of war and the evil it is supposed to avert, and second, the principle of leaving non-combatants unscathed. It was still true that war may be the only moral means to preserve a society which faced attack from an aggressor. In this sense, war was not sought

for its own sake, or for gain, but for the preservation of what was good. Further, this task of safeguarding society was not only to be thought of in terms of maintaining what was good, but of also constructing what could be better. To Catholic moralists nuclear deterrence constituted the lesser evil posed by the threat of atheistic communism. Merton interpreted this as American moral exceptionalism being corrupted by bellicose nationalism The reticence of the Catholic hierarchy and theologians to question nuclear deterrence was indicative of their acceptance that deterrence had worked to date in dissuading Soviet nuclear aggression and so would continue to do so in the future. The real question for moral judgement was whether a concrete strategic option could actually make the world more secure from nuclear disaster or less so. There was no such thing as deterrence in the abstract because policy responded to the dynamic political events. Merton's pacifism presupposed the validity of the just war theory, but it recognised that weapons of mass destruction were not easily harmonised with the traditional just war. This highlighted how estranged Merton was from the political realities of the world he claimed he was supporting through his writings. In essence, Merton's acceptance of his censure demonstrated his awareness that he had an inflated sense of his own worth as a persuasive writer that had blinded him to his lack of understanding of nuclear risk and his political naivety. His primary commitment was to his religious vocation and his writings, but his choice to produce a series of partially thought out arguments revealed his sense that he was writing on borrowed time before the inevitability of censure would befall him. When he was eventually censured he justified his actions as a self-fulfilling prophecy.

Merton's representation of his monastic forbearance bore a symbolic value for the emerging Catholic Left precisely because Merton stressed the impossibility of separating the moral from the political problems of the Cold War. It was Merton's construction of himself as bearing witness to Christian pacifism within institutional Catholicism during the year of the *Cold War Letters* that was to make a contribution to consolidating the spiritual roots of protest for a younger generation of radical Catholics who emerged as members of the American Catholic Left.[11] Merton opposed both the possession and use of nuclear weapons without reservation and so his brand of nuclear pacifism more closely resembled the embryonic nuclear pacifism of the Catholic New Left than the teaching of the Catholic Church.

The historical investigation of this study has brought to the forefront overlooked associations between Our Lady of Gethsemani, the Trappist abbey in Kentucky where Merton lived his religious vocation, and the radical pacifism of the Catholic Worker movement. This was rooted in a mutual appreciation of Benedictine monastic relationship repair. Merton could only engage in pacifist publication projects with the tacit support of his immediate religious superior, Dom James Fox. It was Dom James who arranged for Merton's controversial articles to pass more smoothly to publication through the favourable censorship of Fr. Charles English who had formerly been a member of the Catholic Worker movement before he became a Trappist. It was Dom James who facilitated Merton's hospitality to James Forest and members of the Catholic Worker movement from New York. In turn, Dorothy Day and James Forest of the

[11] Gordon Oyer, *Pursuing the Spiritual Roots of Protest: Merton, Berrigan, Yoder, and Muste at the Gethsemani Abbey Peacemakers Retreat* (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2014).

Catholic Worker movement facilitated Merton's association with the International Fellowship of Reconciliation and the British Pax Society.

Fundamentally, Merton had chosen to engage with the Cold War as a moral problem and not a political problem. His commitment to the dignity of human life was not reducible to calculation and utility and this meant that he held an absolutist position against all war, not just nuclear war. Differences of opinion between Merton and his censors was fundamentally spiritual and not political. Merton espoused building personal relationships through communities of practice through pastoral care in order to work across sectarian divisions. Merton, in this respect, imagined his new socially engaged monasticism could make a positive contribution to Catholic America. Trappist censors, by contrast, evaluated Merton's strident pacifism as dangerous to publish under the *aegis* of the American Trappists because of its potential to misinform the public of Catholic teaching. The institutional decision won out and the public were unaware of Merton's *Cold War Letters* during Merton's lifetime.

Appendix 1:

Life and Writings of Thomas Merton (1915-1968)[1]

1915 – 31st January, born in Prades, France, son of Owen Merton (artist from New Zealand) and of Ruth Jenkins (artist from USA)
1916 - moved to USA, lived at Douglaston, Long Island, with his mother's family
1921 - his mother dies-from cancer
1922 - in Bermuda with his father who went there to paint
1925 - to France with his father, lived at St. Antonin
1926 - entered Lycée Ingres, Montauban, France
1928 - to England-Ripley Court school, then to Oakham (1929), Rutland, England
1931 - his father dies of a brain tumor
1932 - at Oakham School where he acquired a scholarship to Clare College, Cambridge
1933 - visited Italy, summer in USA, up to Clare, Cambridge, modern languages (French and Italian)
1934 - left Cambridge and returned to USA
1935 - entered Columbia University, New York
1937 - at Columbia - editor of the 1937 *Yearbook* and art editor of the *Columbia Jester*
1938 - graduated from Columbia; instructor in English (1938-1939); began reading for an M.A. thesis entitled "Art and Nature in William Blake"
1938 – 16th November - received into Roman Catholicism at Corpus Christi Church, New York
1940-41 - taught English at St. Bonaventure College, Olean, New York
1941 – 10th December - entered Our Lady of Gethsemani, Bardstown, Kentucky
1944 – 19th March - made simple monastic vows, published *Thirty Poems*
1946 - Publishes *A Man in the Divided Sea*
1947 – 19th March - solemn monastic vows, published *Exile Ends in Glory*
1948 – Best-selling autobiography *The Seven Storey Mountain* and *What Are These Wounds?*
1949 – 26th May - ordained priest; publishes *Seeds of Contemplation*; *The Tears of the Blind Lions*; *The Waters of Siloe*
1951-55 - Master of Scholastics (choir monks studying for priesthood)
1951 - 22nd June, naturalized as an American citizen
1951 – Publishes *The Ascent to Truth*
1953 – Publishes *The Sign of Jonas; Bread in the Wilderness*
1954 – Publishes *The Last of the Fathers*
1955-65 - Master of Novices (education of monks)
1955 – Publishes *No Man Is an Island*
1956 – Publishes *The Living Bread*
1957 – Publishes *The Silent Life*; *The Strange Islands*
1958 – Publishes *Thoughts in Solitude*
1959 – Publishes *The Secular Journal of Thomas Merton*; *Selected Poems*
1960 – Publishes *Disputed Questions*; *The Wisdom of the Desert*
1961 – Publishes *The New Man*; *The Behavior of Titans*
1962 – Publishes *A Thomas Merton Reader*; *Breakthrough to Peace*
1963 – Publishes *Emblems of a Season of Fury*; *Life and Holiness*
1963 – 20th October - Awarded inaugural PAX Peace Prize for the year of the *Cold War Letters*
1964 – Publishes *Seeds of Destruction*
1965 – Publishes *Gandhi on Non-Violence*; *The Way of Chuang Tzu*; *Seasons of Celebration*
1965-68 - lived as a hermit on the grounds of the Abbey of Our Lady of Gethsemani, Kentucky
1966 – Publishes *Raids on the Unspeakable*; *Conjectures of a Guilty Bystander*
1967 – Publishes *Mystics and Zen Masters*
1968 – Publishes *Monks Pond*; *Cables to the Ace*; *Faith and Violence*; *Zen and the Birds of Appetite*
1968 – 10th December, accidentally electrocuted in Bangkok, while attending a religious conference.

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[1] Merton, *Essential Writings*, ed. Christine Bochen (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2011), 11-13.

Appendix 2:

The Year of the *Cold War Letters*, 1961-1962

1. Merton, Thomas. "The Root of War." *The Catholic Worker*, October 1, 1961, 1, version of Chapter 16 "The Root of War is Fear" in Merton, T. *New Seeds of Contemplation*. New York: New Directions, 1961 essay reprinted as *Two Articles by Thomas Merton, The Root of War & Red or Dead: The Anatomy of a Cliché*. Nyack, NY: Fellowship publications, 1962 a pamphlet published by the Fellowship of Reconciliation (FOR); Thomas Merton, *Passion for Peace: The Social Essays*. Edited by William H. Shannon, New York: Crossroad, 1995, (*PP*), 11-19.
2. ____. "The Shelter Ethic." ["The Machine Gun in the Fallout Shelter"] written as a comment on the revised version of "The Root of War is Fear" published in *The Catholic Worker*, November 1, 1961: 1, 5; Thomas Merton, *The Nonviolent Alternative*. Edited by Gordon Zahn, New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1980 (*NA*), 103-106; *PP*, 20-26.
3. _____. "Target Equals City" a mimeograph essay Merton started mailing to friends in February 1962, although it was unpublished during his lifetime; *NA*, 94-102; *PP*, 26-36.
4. _____. "Nuclear War and Christian Responsibility." *Commonweal*, February 9,1962, 509-513 translated to German as "Atomkrieg und Christliche Verantwortung," *Der Seelsorger*, September 1962, 377-384; second redraft "Peace: Christian Duties and Perspectives" unpublished in Merton's lifetime; third redraft "We Have To Make Ourselves Heard" *The Catholic Worker*, May 1, 1962, 4-6; *The Catholic Worker*, June 1, 1962, 4-5 expanded as book manuscript *Peace in the Post-Christian Era* commissioned by Macmillan, but unpublished in Merton's lifetime; *PP*, 37-47; second redraft *NA*, 12-19.
5. _____. "Red or Dead: The Anatomy of a Cliché." *Fellowship*, March 1962, 21-23; *PP*, 48-52.
6. _____. "A Martyr for Peace and Unity." ["Testament to Peace"] *Jubilee*, March 1962, 22-25 published anonymously; *NA*, 139-143; *PP*, 37-47.
7. _____. "Christian Ethics and Nuclear War." ["Christian Morality and Nuclear War"] *The Catholic Worker* (March 1962): 2, 7; *NA*, 82-87; *PP*, 56-64.
8. _____. "Religion and the Bomb." *Jubilee* (May 1962): 7-13; *PP*, 65-79.
9. _____."Christian Action in World Crisis." ["Christian Perspective in World Crisis"] *Blackfriars* 43, no. 504 (June 1962): 256-268; *NA*, 219-226; *PP*, 80-91.
10. _____. "Breakthrough to Peace: Introduction" in *Breakthrough to Peace: Twelve Views on the Threat of Thermonuclear Extermination*. Introduction by Thomas Merton, 7-14. New York: New Directions, 1962. *NA*, 76-81; *PP*, 92-98.
11. _____. "Peace: a Religious Responsibility" the fourth redraft of "Nuclear War and Christian Responsibility" was composed of the second redraft "Peace: Christian Duties and Perspectives" and the third redraft "We Have To Make Ourselves Heard" and was published as "Peace: A Religious Responsibility." *Breakthrough to Peace: Twelve Views on the Threat of Thermonuclear Extermination*. Introduction by Thomas Merton, 88-116. New York: New Directions, 1962. *NA*, 107-128; *PP*, 99-123; Thomas Merton, *Selected Essays*, edited by Patrick F. O'Connell, 126-149. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2013.

Appendix 3:

"A Prayer for Peace by Thomas Merton, Holy Week, 1962"
The Congressional Record, Wednesday, April 18, 1962

Mr. KOWALSKI. Mr. Speaker, as Easter approaches and our Nation contemplates the resumption of nuclear testing, I would like to take this occasion to offer a prayer for the preservation of mankind.

My prayer was written for this occasion by Thomas Merton, master of novices at the Abbey of Gethsemani, Trappist, Ky., and a member of the Cistercians of the Strict Observance. Brother Thomas Merton is the author of such enduring works as "Seven Storey Mountain," "Waters of Siloe," "Sign of Jonas," and "Bread in the Wilderness." His most recent work is a prose poem inspired by the bombing at Hiroshima, entitled "Original Child Bomb."

In a letter accompanying his prayer, he writes:

> I feel very close to the people of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. No day goes by without my explicitly praying for the victims of the bomb in my mass. We have an enormous responsibility.
>
> I offer you my wholehearted encouragement in your efforts for peace and disarmament. Such efforts are a sacred duty.

In this prayer Brother Thomas expresses for me the anguish of man groping to control the monstrous weapons he has devised for the annihilation of civilian populations and the sorrow of man for the incalculable injury we and our adversaries inflict on all men and on their children for generations to come.

The world is at the crossroad. Ahead lies either the atomic crucifixion of the human race or a resurrection of faith in God's presence in man.

With unanimous consent, I will read Brother Thomas' prayer:

Almighty and merciful God, Father of all men, creator and ruler of the universe, lord of history, whose designs are Inscrutable, whose glory is without blemish, whose compassion for the errors of men is inexhaustible, in Your will is our peace.

Mercifully hear this prayer which rises to You from the tumult and desperation of a world in which You are forgotten, in which Your name is not invoked, Your laws are derided and Your presence is ignored; because we do not know You, we have no peace.

From the heart of an eternal silence, You have watched the rise of empires and have seen the smoke of their downfall.

You have seen Egypt, Assyria, Babylon, Greece, and Rome, once powerful, carried away like sand in the wind.

You have witnessed the impious fury of 10,000 fratricidal wars, in which great powers have torn whole continents to shreds in the name of peace and Justice.

And now our Nation itself stands in imminent danger of a war the like of which has never been seen.

This Nation dedicated to freedom, not to power, has obtained through freedom a power, it did not desire.

And seeking by that power to defend its freedom, it is enslaved by the processes and policies of power. Must we wage a war we do not desire, a war that can do us no good, and which our very hatred of war forces us to prepare?

A day of ominous decision has now dawned on this free nation. Armed with a titanic weapon, and convinced of our own right, we face a powerful adversary, armed with the same weapon, equally convinced that he is right.

In this moment of destiny, this moment we never foresaw, we cannot afford to fail. Our choice of peace or war may decide our judgment and publish it in an eternal record.

In this fatal moment of choice in which we might still begin the patient architecture of peace, we may also take the last step across the rim of chaos.

Save us then from our obsessions. Open our eyes, dissipate our confusions, teach us to understand ourselves and our adversary. Let us never forget that sins against the law of love are punished by loss of faith, and those without faith stop at no crime to achieve their ends.

Help us to be masters of the weapons that threaten to master us.

Help us to use our science for peace and plenty, not for war and destruction.

Show us how to use atomic power to bless our childrens' children, not to blight them.

Save us from the compulsion to follow our adversaries in all that we most hate, confirming them in their hatred and suspicion of us.

Resolve our inner contradictions, which now grow beyond belief and beyond bearing, they are at once a torment and a blessing: for if you had not left us the light of conscience, we would not have to endure them.

Teach us to be long suffering in anguish and insecurity.

Teach us to wait and trust. Grant light, grant strength and patience to all who work for peace-to this Congress, our President, our military forces, and our adversaries.

Grant us prudence in proportion to our power, wisdom in proportion to our science, humaneness in proportion to our wealth and might, and bless our earnest will to help all races and peoples to travel in friendship with us along the road to justice, liberty, and lasting peace.

But grant us above all to see that our ways are not necessarily Your ways, that we cannot fully penetrate the mystery of Your designs, and that the very storm of power now raging on this earth reveals Your hidden will and Your inscrutable decision.

Grant us to see Your face in the lightning of this cosmic storm, O God of holiness, merciful to men, grant us to seek peace where it is truly found.

In Your will, O God, is our peace. Amen.

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