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# The Correspondence of Thomas Merton and Czeslaw Milosz

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## Monasticism and Society in Dialogue

### *Introduction*

FOR MORE THAN FIFTY YEARS Thomas Merton has been one of the most popular monastic authors read by nonmonastic audiences, not only in the United States, where he first wrote and published, but also in large parts of the rest of the world. However he may be evaluated within monastic circles, his popularity certainly indicates something about the interface of monastery and society. Hundreds of thousands of readers from society have been fascinated by this monk. Why?

Czeslaw Milosz is considered one of the greatest, one of the deepest poets of the twentieth century. Poets register the anguish and hopes of their times, and they do this well when they themselves live this anguish and these hopes as their own. Milosz's life and writings constitute a profound expression, rooted in the history of the century, of what society has suffered and hoped for. He is the quintessential poet and so may be considered a quintessential representative of his age.

The published correspondence of Thomas Merton and Czeslaw Milosz is an intriguing record of monasticism and society in dialogue.<sup>1</sup> From the side of Milosz we see a twentieth-century seeker,

a Catholic like Merton, looking to a monk for guidance, who at the same time does not hesitate to criticize the monk. From the side of Merton we see a monk intensely caught up in literary and other movements of his time, showing himself sometimes a valuable contributor and at other times somewhat confused in his identity as a monk. This article examines the range of questions about monastery and society in dialogue that this correspondence contains.

It should be noted at the outset that I am using both Merton and Milosz here in an emblematic way. The one is a “type,” as it were, of the monk; the other a “type” of the poet. As such, I am not so much writing directly about either author seeking to understand him in himself qua author. For after all, these are letters and not finished literary products offered by Merton and Milosz to their reading publics. I use these letters to watch the monk in his relationship to society and to watch society in relationship to the monk.

### *Merton Initiates Contact*

Merton initiated the correspondence with Milosz in 1959 after reading Milosz’s *The Captive Mind*, a book that studies the social psychology of Communism. Merton was in general a sharp and thoughtful reader who read voraciously on any number of themes. That he had been among the first to read Milosz in English and recognize his importance is typical of Merton. Here we see the monk as not merely retired from society to think peaceful, divine thoughts in his silent cloister. Rather, here is an American monk trying to get to a deeper level of what was being considered in so shallow a way by so much of American culture in the 1950s, namely, the real nature of communism. It was not enough to consider Communists as evil and dangerous, to prepare atom bombs to blow them up. Milosz had helped Merton to try to understand “the lure of Marxism in the wake of the erosion of the religious imagination.”<sup>2</sup>

If it is typical that the monk Merton found his way to an author like Milosz, it is even more typical that he should write him and

seek to establish a correspondence with him. He writes to Milosz saying, "Having read your remarkable book 'The Captive Mind' I find it necessary to write to you, as without your help I am unable to pursue certain lines of thought which this book suggests" (*STB*, 3; December 6, 1958).<sup>3</sup> Slightly later he adds, "I find it [the book] especially important for myself in my position as a monk, a priest and a writer. . . . Your book has come to me, then, as something I can call frankly 'spiritual,' that is to say as the inspiration of much thought, meditation and prayer about my own obligations to the rest of the human race, and about the predicament of us all" (*STB*, 3-4). It is striking here to see the monk so open to one from society, even seeking spiritual guidance from him. We are more accustomed to things moving in the opposite direction.

Milosz did not long delay in answering Merton. He was clearly pleased at Merton's interest and wrote him at length, further explaining *The Captive Mind* and being critical in part of himself in what he had written there. He knew of Merton as an author, though he had not yet read much of him. "I confess I do not know your prose books, from time to time I meet your poetry" (*STB*, 10; January 17, 1959). But this first letter had, in Milosz's own description, "an external, informative character" (*STB*, 13).

Merton was not put off by this. His reply is enthusiastic. If in the first letter he began, "Dear Mr. Milosz," now in only the second letter he begins with the warmer, "My Dear Milosz," and opens by saying, "Thanks for your splendid letter." He goes on to enter into further discussion about *The Captive Mind* and from there to touch upon his own efforts as a writer. He mentions also some of his own reactions to authors Milosz had mentioned in his own first letter. In this way the initial pattern of the correspondence is established. The two are happy to talk about other writers and also to share with each other bits and pieces of their own writings, with Merton suggesting ways and places Milosz might publish in English and with Milosz suggesting something similar for Merton in Polish. Merton's finish to this second letter, where he is decidedly warmer and more

himself, also directly touches on a spiritual theme. Indeed, it is a monk trying to give encouragement to society's writer, who is perhaps discouraged. He says,

Milosz—life is on our side. The silence and the Cross of which we know are forces that cannot be defeated. In silence and suffering, in the heartbreaking effort to be honest in the midst of dishonesty (most of all our *own* dishonesty), in all these is victory. It is Christ in us who drives us through the darkness to a light of which we have no conception and which can only be found by passing through apparent despair.

He signs himself, “Deep affection and solidarity in Christ—Tom Merton” (*STB*, 19–20; February 28, 1959).<sup>4</sup>

Obviously we do not have time here to pursue in detail all the themes opened up by this rich pattern of correspondence. From among many possible, I want to choose several that are especially interesting for showing the fruitful interchange between monastery and society. In all the letters that follow, discussion of their own writings and the writings of others will be what provides the structure for their increasingly deeper conversations. Spiritual themes, like that which Merton touched on in his second letter, will also come more and more to the fore in different ways.

### *Milosz Seeks to Shape the Monk as Writer*

We can begin with Milosz's letter to Merton in which he reacts to Merton's very popular diary of monastic life called *The Sign of Jonas*. Here we see that early in the correspondence a very frank level of interchange had already been established. Within the optic of why we are examining these letters, we can say that what we have here is nothing less than a statement of what society might look for in the writing of a monk—and the suggestion is that Merton has not yet delivered it. Milosz begins with a few initial positive remarks. “I

feel your book is useful as it shows that a kind of life considered in general as monotonous or gray can be rich and full of experiences” (*STB*, 58).<sup>5</sup> But then he comes to his main point. He says,

But usefulness of your book is limited for somebody who is seriously interested in “anatomy of faith” if you permit that expression, somewhat improper. . . . That question tortures today many people. . . . The problem is very difficult: literature is too subjective, theological treatises too abstract. Your diary describes your internal country in its *results*. . . . What you describe is like a jungle for people who have never seen one. (*STB*, 60; emphasis mine)

This is already frank enough. But Milosz sustains and develops his criticism—or might it better be termed an analysis accompanied by a request, indeed, a plea to the monk. He says, still speaking of *The Sign of Jonas*,

I was waiting for something—nothing sensational and dramatic—to happen, namely a kind of summa from time to time, and not only in terms of stages of your development. To be more clear, for instance nature in your book is contaminating, one is under its spell, but it is a background, nature is spiritualized and I waited for a moment when you meet her not only in its beauty or calm but also in its immutability of law: a dead beetle on your path. (*STB*, 60–61).

Here Milosz is putting before Merton a question that tortured him for a great part of his life: that of the cruelty of nature’s immutable laws.<sup>6</sup> This becomes, through the course of Milosz’s writings, a huge theological question. Who is God and who are we if nature is as cruel as she is? Though Milosz faces this question again and again in his published writings, here we see him privately turning to a monk and hoping for some light. He continues, “To put it in a naïve way: I waited [he is still referring to what he was waiting for in the monk’s

diary] for some answers to many theological questions but answers not abstract as in a theological treatise, just on that border between the intellect and our imagination, a border so rarely explored today in religious thinking: we lack an image of the world, ordered by religion, while Middle Ages had such an image” (*STB*, 61).

I want to pause—Milosz is still not done and we will come shortly to the rest—and try to take the measure of how important is Milosz’s suggestion here. He is asking for something that he thinks only a monk might be able to give, that is, theology, yes, but not in the sense of an intellectual abstraction, but something closer to the imagination, which the poetry of monastic life should be able to provide. (A little farther on in the letter he clarifies that he is not attempting to convince Merton to become a theologian in the Dominican tradition, which for Milosz is an emblem of the theological intellectualism that he thinks is not meeting his question where it needs to be met [*STB*, 62].) Milosz longs for what he calls “an image of the world ordered by religion.” Such an ordered world seems to be destroyed in the society at large because, as Milosz suggests here and often in his writings, since the Enlightenment such an ordered worldview shaped by a religious imagination has simply been destroyed. In this letter he is wondering, he is perhaps hoping beyond hope, that such a world might still be found in the monastery. He says to Merton,

But a reader (I can judge by introspection only) is eager to learn (gradually) what is the image of the world in Thomas Merton. In a period when the image accepted by majority is clear: empty Sky, no pity, stone wasteland, life ended by death. I imagine a reader who says: he possessed a secret, he succeeded in solving the puzzle, his world is harmonious, yet in his diary he tells already about sequences while we would be ready to follow him in 5 volumes through a very vision of the world redeemed by Christ. In how many books we can find it if we exclude books of devotion? (*STB*, 62)<sup>7</sup>

“A vision of the world redeemed by Christ”—this is what Milosz hopes for from his monastic interlocutor. But the poet in Milosz understands that such a vision must deal directly with images and not in intellectual abstractions. Images dominate the present dark times: “empty Sky, no pity, stone wasteland, life ended by death.” It must be met in kind by images, and it would seem that Milosz hopes for nothing less than this from Merton.

This in fact is a huge request, perhaps asking too much. Nonetheless, it is moving to see Milosz approach Merton in this way. I want to identify it as society approaching the monk for hope—and let it be noted, a hope based on “an *image* of the world redeemed in Christ” and not mere intellectual abstractions. Merton’s response, which comes at least two months later, is disappointing, though he probably ought to be forgiven this, for as I suggest, too much was being asked.<sup>8</sup> Merton begins by excusing himself for being so long to reply and then says, “Yours [Milosz’s letter] required much thought, and I still haven’t come through with anything intelligent or worthy of your wise observations” (*STB*, 69; May 6, 1960). From this he dives into an explanation of himself before a particular criticism that Milosz had made, namely, Merton’s being under the spell of nature, speaking only of its beauty or calm. It is striking that Merton begins his response here; Milosz has clearly touched a nerve. Merton says—and he appears to be on the defensive—

Not that there is not plenty of resentment in me: but it is not resentment against nature, only against people, institutions and myself. I suppose this is a real defect, or rather a limitation: but actually what it amounts to is that I am in complete and deep complicity with nature, or imagine I am: that nature and I are very good friends, and console one another for the stupidity and the infamy of the human race and its civilization. We at least get along, I say to the trees, and though I am perfectly aware that the spider eats the fly, that the singing of the birds may perhaps have something to do with hatred or

pain of which I know nothing, still I can't make much of it.  
(*STB*, 69–70)

This is, as I say, disappointing if we take it at the level at which I am primarily trying to focus. It is a disappointing monastic answer to society's hopes and requests. But if we reflect on it further, Merton's limited answer—not much more at first glance than a clever and slightly sassy extended quip—perhaps brings us into direct contact with the actual monastic reality and not the idealized one to which Milosz was addressing himself. Merton is at least candid, confessing his position as “a real defect, or rather a limitation.” Theoretically a monk should have a better answer than Merton had, but Merton, with a certain admirable admission of poverty, confesses that he can do no better. For our purposes, it reminds us that whatever it is and whatever it may be able to offer, a monastery is not an idealized realm. Any answers that come from it in society's direction will have to be carved out by real struggle and work on the monk's part. On this question Milosz had perhaps done more work. Merton himself admits as much in a journal entry made two days after writing this letter. “Answered Milosz's letter written in February. It is deep and sound and questions my innocent and optimistic friendship with nature, my lack of manichaeian poison. Have I right not be poisoned in this way? . . . My answer was inadequate, and I must think of it more. For instance the awareness that nature is *alien* and *heartless* is becoming inevitable, as the awareness of man's own alienation, emptiness and heartliness increases.”<sup>9</sup>

This is not simply a question of Milosz “winning that round,” so to speak. It is more complex than that. Society delivered a very challenging request to the monk, and the monk was not up to the level of delivering an adequate response. Nonetheless, we encounter in Merton perhaps the secret of any monk's real strength and contribution—his capacity to admit his poverty and not to presume that all life's wisdom will flow simply in one direction, from the monastery toward the world. Alas, a monk is not a man with a

secret storehouse of answers for life's big mysteries but is rather, as St. Benedict puts it, one "who seeks God."<sup>10</sup> If in the course of his seeking, he finds himself too small before the mystery, the confession of this poverty holds a hidden promise and can, paradoxically, give hope to those in society who see the monk in his struggle.

In any case, despite Merton's falling short here, the relationship stays quite alive. For the rest of the long letter, Merton speaks of many different literary and spiritual questions and toward the end is even vulnerable in expressing his need for the relationship with Milosz. He says, "I enjoy writing to you and hearing from you in return, and believe that it is very important for both of us to correspond like this. . . . There are only very few in the monastery to whom I can talk as I talk to you . . . I value the sound of your voice and appreciate highly anything that you say" (*STB*, 76). Society's poet can help the monk in his search in a way that most of the monk's own brothers seem not able to. Milosz, for his part, will answer Merton in just as lively and lengthy a way several months later.<sup>11</sup>

### *Mutual Influence on the Image of a Writer*

As the friendship grows more solid through the exchange of letters, both men try to help each other to refine their sense of themselves as writers, to articulate what each in his own way was very sensitive to, namely, their responsibilities as writers. Milosz is just as vulnerable in expressing his need for Merton. "You can help and guide me," he says. "I hope to meet you personally one day. I had some scruples as to our correspondence—I did not want to take too much of your time for answers. But now your letter would be for me a great joy" (*STB*, 93; October 30, 1960). Merton answered him almost immediately.<sup>12</sup> In fact, in his letter Milosz had shared with Merton that he has just moved from Paris to Berkeley to take up a position at the University of California. Merton welcomes Milosz to America and immediately launches into a stinging denunciation of American culture. "Certainly there are enormous problems and

difficulties about the life of an intellectual in America,” he begins (*STB*, 94). This is a warning for Milosz’s sake, but shortly after he adds, “In reality I think you will find here many healthy unexploited possibilities” (*STB*, 95). Nonetheless, Merton does not let up with his sardonic censures. “They [the army high command and the captains of industry] are getting tired of being hated and want to give the world a genuine reason for hating them. No doubt they will” (*STB*, 95–96).

In the course of this outburst Merton offers an interesting reflection to Milosz on what their own role as writers might be in the midst of the unpromising cultural scene in America.

So I am tempted to wonder whether you and I do not after all have some kind of responsibility toward these people who are certainly, up to a point, waiting for anything we say, and quite ready to accept it. I fear being deluded and deceived by them. Perhaps I fear it too much and this may have a lot to do with my solitude, which always anticipates defeat and frustration. But after all if we have a hearing, we ought to humbly and courageously say what we have to say, clearly, forcefully, insistently and for the glory of God’s truth, not for any self-interest. And of course this means that we will *not* be pure, either. But knowing we will partly fail, we can at least try to be, and accept the consequences. (*STB*, 96)

This is a very telling paragraph. First of all we should note that Merton puts himself and Milosz together here in a kind of common responsibility before a group of readers also common to them both, “people waiting for anything we say and quite ready to accept it.” Typical of Merton, he does not know whether he really likes this situation or not. He professes fear, but one can sense between the lines also a certain self-satisfaction at the problem of having people waiting on his next words. Finally, he suggests that since they have a hearing, they ought to take advantage of the situation to say some-

thing and to do so as purely as possible, “for the glory of God’s truth.” This is in some sense a virtually programmatic statement. In their common bond of faith, in their common work as writers, the monk is suggesting that both men should summon their courage and speak their word into the very troubled American scene.

In this same letter Merton utters some beautiful words that show in a very genuine way his sense of solidarity with the troubled world, a sense of solidarity that Merton identifies, rightly so, as monastic.

There is no use in our being upset by weakness and sin in anyone: we are all in the same boat, and there is no point in being squeamish and repelled by it. . . . I have certainly not come to the monastery to feel myself isolated from sin, but to bear all sins along with my own and to be, as Dostoevsky’s Zossima says, responsible to everyone for everything. It is not exactly charming, and it is sometimes like being in hell. (*STB*, 98)

This is Merton at his best, and we can imagine that such words would have been a kind of consolation to Milosz. Through his friendship with this monk, Milosz is learning ever more concretely that a monastery is not an idealized realm. Indeed, “it is sometimes like being in hell.” But again, paradoxically, Merton has perhaps proffered here once more a real monastic contribution: the confession of poverty, of sin, of solidarity.

*Milosz: “Shrewd Judge of the Sickness of America”*

In the next letter from Milosz to Merton, Milosz opens expressing his “astonishment” with Merton’s article on Heraclitus. He says warmly, “This is for me a proof of our deep spiritual affinity—if I dare to use that expression” (*STB*, 100; undated). In the course of this letter Milosz begins to share his own reactions to the American cultural scene. His thoughts are calmer, more measured than Merton’s outburst on the same. “It seems to me that America is bursting with talents and in-

telligence, but minds are turning round in a sort of spellbound dance of paralytics. The awakening is inevitable—but when and what awakening?” (*STB*, 102). He struggles to get to the bottom of the problem, to find the right diagnosis. It seems to me that the following insight is an extremely perspicacious diagnosis. He says,

Perhaps a great mistake of Catholics consists in this [speaking about a possible Catholic contribution to the present American problems]: they are satisfied too much with the notion of “human nature” and there is no place in their thinking for what is neither the individual nor society but society established in the soul of the individual. Perhaps a few individuals can liberate themselves under the influence of Grace. But millions and millions are condemned to terrible limitations which are not their fault. (*ibid.*)

It is worth pausing to be sure that we catch all that Milosz is suggesting here. The tradition of natural law, so important for so many of the theological positions that the Catholic Church articulates, has nonetheless a weakness in confronting the complex cultural scene that Milosz and Merton are struggling so hard to understand. The tradition speaks too abstractly, Milosz is arguing, when it distinguishes neatly between human nature and society, as if we could easily articulate how individual human natures ought to act within society based on what we know human nature to be according to the natural law. We are not, unfortunately, merely products of the natural law. We are all products of our society, and the Catholic vision, according to Milosz, does not detect this fact. What is needed is some way of conceiving how society creeps into the soul of an individual, rendering that individual helpless to act rightly. A very concrete instance of the problem for Milosz is television. He is appalled by the effects of American television. It is society creeping into the individual soul and destroying it. “I feel the heavy illness of American society is closely connected with ‘mass media,’ one should look for its roots there” (*STB*, 101).

In this letter, and also elsewhere in his writing, Milosz shows himself to be driven almost insane as he notes the soul-destroying effects of television. "I have an idea, perhaps crazy," he says to Merton (STB, 104). In the optic of our present inquiry, this idea is like a desperate cry from society to the monk, saying in effect, "Do something!" What he proposes is that Merton use his prestige as a well-known monk and writer to wage a national campaign against the inanities of television. It *is* a crazy idea. And yet it is touching to see how Milosz in his desperation turns in all seriousness to his monk friend. "If you launch an appeal, you will fail at first. Yet your appeal will provoke a great stir. It will be a sign of breaking the generalised apathia and impotence" (STB, 105). Here is some of what society sometimes hopes for from a monk: provoking a stir, breaking generalized apathy and impotence.

Of course, Merton is not able to undertake what Milosz proposes. In his response, Merton exposes a good deal of his own monastic struggle. In fact, he wrote two letters to Milosz on the same day, the one as an afterthought to the other. In a journal entry also written that day, Merton says, "Wrote two letters to Czeslaw Milosz. He is a terrific correspondent, full of wise insights, shrewd judge of the sickness of America, wants me to campaign against TV. It is 4 months since he wrote. I waited too long to answer him, thinking I will have something more adequate to say."<sup>13</sup> This is quite interesting. We have seen Merton answering Milosz with enthusiasm on virtually the same day he had heard from him. Now we see four months of what to some extent we would be permitted to interpret as an embarrassed silence. In his answer Merton's struggle and ambiguity is clear. Our first reaction might be that we could have hoped for something better from a monk. But again, perhaps, there is some paradoxical contribution from the monk's sharing his struggle. The monk tells his friend,

I feel nothing but helplessness in my situation: I should ideally speaking have a wonderful perspective from which to see

things in a different—a Heraclitean—light. But at the same time there is so much confusion around me and in my own self. In monastic life there is a fatal mixture of inspiration and inertia that produces an awful inarticulate guilt in anyone who does not simply bury his head in the sand. You never know when you are right and how far you can go in studying the world outside and reacting to it. There are infinite temptations, the first of which is to think that one is separate from it all and somehow “pure,” while really we are full of the same poisons. Hence we fight in ourselves many of the same ambiguities. (*STB*, 109; March 28, 1961)

This confession is extremely important for our project of articulating the relationship between monastery and society as exhibited through this correspondence. Monastery and society are not two purely distinct and distinguishable realms. Rather, society is very much in the monk. What is distinctive perhaps is that the monastery can be—Merton struggles to make it so—a place where society’s ills are fought against, but first and foremost in the monk himself. However, Merton notes that this cannot easily happen, for in monastic life there is “a fatal mixture of *inspiration* and *inertia*.” In its inspiration, both Milosz and Merton would place their hope. But Merton informs Milosz of what may be a surprise to the latter: inertia in the monastery. It is not only people outside the monastery who may be tempted to think of it as the idealized realm of peace and wisdom; monks themselves may fall into this trap and can only continue in such an illusion by hiding their head in the sand—inertia. Neat patterns of monastic observance can actually protect monks from driving more deeply into themselves and discovering their own complicity in the problem. This, Merton describes as a temptation. The monk is tempted to think of himself as separate and pure. But no, the same poisons are in him.

After his initial soul-searching admissions in this letter, Merton continues a bit more directly to explain why he could not really launch the anti-television campaign that Milosz envisions. “It might

ideally be true. I *should* certainly be in such a position [to launch a campaign]. . . . For me, however, to raise this one question would mean raising an unlimited series of other questions which I am not prepared to face. . . . I don't trust myself to even begin it. There are too many ambiguities, too many hatreds, that would have to be sweated out first" (*STB*, 111, 113). With what he confesses here Merton offers us an invaluable insight into a realistic understanding of the relationship between monastery and society. The monastery is not a bastion from which attacks are launched on society. Rather, the battle is within the monk himself, and it is the same battle that society ought to wage.

### *A New Attempt of a Pascal*

Milosz writes back to Merton after a two-month interval. A kind of longing is expressed in his opening lines to the monk: "There are too many things to tell, which makes writing a letter hard. Those things are rather internal than external" (*STB*, 115; May 30, 1961). Then he adds, "Let me get rid of some details of current life first." So, he shares news of his teaching and engages in some of their usual literary banter and business. But then he comes to his "internal" concern. He is speaking writer to writer, wondering with him, searching with him, about the kind of writing called for. He says, "I realize that nothing is more important than to find a common language with those who 'search in despair,' through poetry, prose, any means. Being one of them: the blind leading the lame. Yes, what is needed is a new attempt of a Pascal. Possible, in my opinion" (*STB*, 119). A new attempt of a Pascal—this is a condensed, shorthand image of what Milosz sees the need for. Merton surely would have understood it. Pascal: the reasons of the heart; challenging his contemporaries in attractive ways to the risk of believing; unmasking the pretenses of prevailing fashion; beautiful, compelling writing.

This said, that is, Pascal proposed as an image, Milosz turns to Merton and offers both a criticism and a challenge. This is an in-

tensification of what we have already seen: society turning to the monastery, hoping to find there that for which it longs. Concerning a writing like Pascal's, Milosz says to Merton, "Your books, useful as they are, do not belong to that category." Then he describes the writing he envisions and seeks to draw Merton toward it: "I see in the air the shape of such a book: somebody will write it. Perhaps you? It should be a book of great simplicity: what I believe and not why I believe but how I believe, namely, to draw a contour around what is hardly formulable, by images taken not from a religious experience" (*STB*, 119). Milosz adds to this challenge his own proposed explanation of why it may not have occurred to Merton to see the need for such a description of belief. He says, "It is probable that when one is a monk, exercise and routine transfer him so to say on the other side and certain first premises of faith become natural." It is as if he is saying something to the effect of, "It may be natural for you as a monk to believe, but it is not for us. In a simple way, show us how. But don't take your images from religion. Take them from what we know, from our lives." This is extremely challenging, and Milosz admits as much. He finishes his letter by saying, "Here is a thrust aimed at you, I do not deny. Or an appeal. . . . Forgive me: I would like to have in you an ally of the *angoisse*, I say what I think" (*STB*, 120).

Merton answers almost immediately. Once again Milosz—society's "appeal"—has provoked in the monk a moving confession of his own inadequacy. "I have *not* coped with the basic theological questions. It only looks that way. . . . There are times when I feel spiritually excommunicated. And that it is right and honest for me to be so. It is certain that my writing is not adequate and I am oppressed by the people who think that it is and who admire it as if it really answered questions. I have given the impression I had answers" (*STB*, 120–21; June 5, 1961). Yet again Merton shows his deep capacity for self-knowledge and self-accusation. This may be disappointing for us, but it is also, as I have pointed out several times, something typical of the monk, what I am suggesting may be ultimately the deeper monastic contribution.

Thus far in his letter Merton is impressive at least for what he admits of his shortcomings. The paragraph that follows, however, is less impressive, for in it there is an angry edge to what he says and now he locates the problem no longer within himself but in others. He speaks of these others with a disdain unbecoming to a monk.

There is something wrong with questions that are supposed to be disposed of by answers. That is the trouble with the squares. They think that when you have answers you no longer have questions. And they want the greatest possible number of answers, the smallest number of questions. The ideal is to have no more questions. Then when you have no questions you have "peace." On the other hand, the more you simply stand with the questions all sticking in your throat at once, the more you unsettle the "peace" of those who think they have swallowed all the answers. The questions cause one to be nauseated by answers. This is a healthy state but it is not acceptable. Hence I am nauseated by answers and nauseated by optimism. (*STB*, 121)

Not ten days pass before society sends its answer to the hard-edged monk.

I do not agree with you when you say that you do not want answers, as answers are what the "squares" want. They are right if they have that desire. We have to integrate new and new questions and answers into a new image of the human universe. That's why theology is, I feel, important. . . . Existential angst is not enough. . . . I feel that only a continuous chase after answers can be a driving force. (*STB*, 126; June 5, 1961)

Milosz shows himself the wiser of the two in this exchange. He is more compassionate and understanding of why people seek answers. In effect he chides the monk for a monastic version of existential angst. One senses in Merton's outburst that he some-

how rather enjoys his not having answers and not wanting them. Perhaps the monastery grants him a kind of protection where he can enjoy the luxury of such an attitude. But Milosz sees that such protection is not granted himself and the people he is concerned to reach. For these “a continuous chase after answers” must be the driving force.

Merton backs off a little in a letter written several months later, but there is still an angry edge around his words. “Certainly I have no objections to theologians and theological thought (this refers to our last two letters back in the early summer. I only wish that theologians were more alive and that their thought was thought” (*STB*, 127; September 16, 1961; the closing parenthesis mark is not in the original). Milosz had reminded Merton of the importance of theology. Merton grants his point but cannot do so without his snide jab. He goes on to mention the well-known theologian Jean Daniélou, who had recently visited. “He is more my style, and I get along fine with him,” Merton says. But then again, another jab: “Yet even with him I feel there are two drawbacks: a certain reflex of ecclesiastical caution which has nothing to do with truth but only with keeping ‘correct’ on the right side of the authorities” (*STB*, 127). This is hardly a fair assessment of Daniélou’s much admired sense of balance as a theologian.<sup>14</sup>

Merton is more convincing later in the letter when he comes back to Milosz’s disagreement with him about the importance of having answers. Merton seeks to acquit himself and is more true to life this time, even if he still appears somewhat defensive.

There is no question in my mind that there is a need to integrate new questions and answers in a human universe: when I said I was fed up with answers, I meant square answers, ready made answers, answers that ignore the question. All clear answers tend to be of this nature today, because we are so deep in confusion and grab desperately at five thousand glimmers of seeming clarity. It is better to start with a good acceptance of the dark. That in itself contains many answers in a form

that is not yet worked out: one has the answers, but not the full meaning. (*STB*, 129)

Defensive or not, these last several sentences seem quite wise to me. An acceptance of the dark, Merton suggests, is already a kind of answer, even if it is not yet fully worked out. Such a suggestion is a monk at his best.

### *Merton's "Rage and Fervor"*

I mentioned that it is a habit of both correspondents to share with each other certain pieces they have written. Merton finishes this letter by saying, "Anyway here is this poem and in a few days I want to send you another mss that is a sort of statement of my position now" (*ibid.*). This manuscript is identified in the published correspondence as "A Letter to Pablo Antonio Cuadra Concerning Giants" (*ibid.*).<sup>15</sup> Naturally Merton would be anxious to have Milosz read some statement of his present position. However, three days after his letter to Milosz, Merton makes a journal entry in which he speaks about the letter to Cuadra that, among other things, he was intending to send to Milosz. The journal entry confirms my observations about the hard edge to Merton's thoughts at this time.

The letter to Pablo Antonio Cuadra which I wrote last week is bitter and unjust. It lacks perspective. It cannot do much good to anyone in its present shape, and yet I have mailed it off to him and it may get published (though only in Nicaragua) before I have time to make any serious changes. How did it get to be so violent and unfair? The root is my own fear, my own desperate desire to survive even if only as a voice uttering an angry protest, while the waters of death close over the whole continent.<sup>16</sup>

This is an impressive and searching examination of conscience by a monk. It is consequently disappointing to read a journal entry

four days later in which Merton mentions, "I sent the Cuadra letter to Carrera Andrade in Caracas. Still have not corrected it."<sup>17</sup> Merton had first mentioned this letter to Milosz in September. The following January he speaks of it again, with no indication of the pangs of conscience about it mentioned in the journal. Indeed, he seems rather pleased with himself. He says to Milosz, "I will send you an open letter I wrote with a certain amount of rage and fervor, addressed to him, it is appearing in lots of places and is probably too hot for Poland or I would offer it to *Znak*" (*STB*, 137; January 18, 1962).

In this same letter Merton shows his "rage and fervor" on several other issues. One of these is in response to Milosz's hesitating to identify himself as a Catholic writer. Milosz's reasons for this are very much concerned with the complexity of his own Polish situation and what being labeled "Catholic" within that situation would mean.<sup>18</sup> So it is odd to see Merton so quick to join him on this question, seeming not to realize how different his own situation is from Milosz's. Indeed, Merton's whole image and readership is based on his being a Catholic monk. Yet he says to his friend, "You don't know how well I understand what you say about not wanting to declare yourself a Catholic and wear the label." One can't help but feel Merton somehow pleased with himself for creating a situation that is, to use his own words about the Cuadra letter, too hot. He continues, "Thus I feel a certain equanimity and even smugness at the thought of my own possible excommunication. I cannot be a Catholic unless it is made quite clear to the world that I am a Jew and a Moslem, unless I am execrated as a Buddhist and denounced for having undermined all that this comfortable and social Catholicism stands for" (*STB*, 136–37). Twenty years earlier in *The Seven Storey Mountain*, in brilliant literary style, Merton had told the compelling story of his taking on the label "Catholic." I can't help but sense that there is somehow less gravity to his own position now than in Milosz's very real struggle over this question.

*Milosz on the Monk's Antiwar Involvement*

Milosz's next letter to Merton does not answer him directly on this Catholic question, but it is a very frank letter of opposition to the general spirit of rebellion that Merton has been showing. It focuses on Merton's involvement in the antiwar movement. This letter, together with Merton's previous letter, begins to mark what I discern as a subtle but definite turn in the correspondence. Milosz becomes increasingly critical of Merton, Merton increasingly on the defensive. Milosz continues to appear in all his struggling wisdom, Merton increasingly less impressive. Milosz still is the lay Catholic seeking something from his friend, the monk and priest. Less and less can Merton deliver the goods.

After a short opening sentence in which Milosz thanks Merton for some things sent him, he comes directly and bluntly to his point. "I am completely puzzled by your papers on duties of a Christian and on war. Perhaps I am wrong. My reaction is emotional: no." Then he enumerates three reasons: skepticism as to moral action that seems Utopian, distrust of peace movements from his Polish experience, and "Noble-sounding words turning around the obvious, because nobody would deny that atomic war is one of the greatest evils." Milosz, much more shaped by the brutal experience of the war in Poland and extremely distrustful of postwar communist talk about peace, is practical in what he tells Merton about his peace movement. "It is possible that every peace manifesto for every 1 person converted throws 5 persons to the extreme right, by a reaction against 'defeatism.'" In other words, the monk may be pleased with himself for his protest and feel his conscience thereby cleansed, but the net result will be to turn people to a dangerous right-wing reaction. Milosz thinks that the Catholic Church could be, theoretically at least, in a position to do something with more effective results. "What would be more important is action through the Roman Church, if possible, in order to warn people against easy or apparently easy solutions offered by various shades of the

new right and warn the Catholics against my association with such well-looking patriotic societies” (*STB*, 138–39; undated). Yes, but in his last letter Merton was feeling “a certain equanimity and even smugness” at the thought of his own being excommunicated from the Church. So, it probably will not be this monk who can effectively warn people against easy solutions from the right. Milosz is suggesting that Merton’s and others’ peace movement will drive people farther to the right.

This is a very strong letter. It is undated, but Merton speaks of it in a journal entry made on February 6, 1962. He took it very seriously. “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. For he has been through it. And we have not.”<sup>19</sup> He then makes notes to himself, summarizing the main points of Milosz’s letter. He takes the latter’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.” Merton struggles with what his involvement should be. At the end of that journal entry, the whole of which reveals that his struggle is evident and honest, he has found again the voice of a monk, even if he has not resolved the ambiguities. He says, “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.”<sup>20</sup>

The monk is evidently thinking hard about what his lay friend has written to him. But before he can formulate an answer, Milosz writes again, on March 14, five weeks after Merton’s journal entry. He begins, “Dear, dear Merton.” He continues, “I am sad as I have been thinking that perhaps I offended you, that I should not have used in a hurry so harsh words speaking of your writings for peace” (*STB*, 141; March 14, 1962). Milosz continues with his apology, saying that in effect as a visitor to America he has no competence to comment. Nonetheless, in this second letter Milosz directs an even more soul-searching critique toward Merton. In the optic of our

present examination, here we have society chiding the monk for the particular way in which he has involved himself in the world. Milosz says to Merton,

Yet I ask myself why you feel such a itch for activity? Is that so that you are unsatisfied with your having plunged too deep into contemplation and now you wish to compensate through growing another wing, so to say? And peace provides you with the only link with American young intellectuals outside? Yet activity to which you are called is perhaps different? Should you become a belated rebel, out of solidarity with rebels without cause? (*STB*, 142)

In effect, Milosz is counseling the monk that he has grown restless and warning him against courting a kind of popularity with the younger generation, whom Milosz diagnoses curtly as “rebels without a cause.” If there were ever an antidote to Thomas Merton’s tendency to court popularity, it would certainly be Czeslaw Milosz, who through his whole life never courted popularity by adjusting his positions and tones to current fashion.

Milosz, however, in this letter is not merely critical. Once again he constructively pushes Merton toward a contribution as a writer that would square better with his monastic life. He says,

Now, when there is such a chaos in the world of arts and letters, the most sane, intelligent (and of the best literary style) are works of French theologians. They perform an important and lasting task. We are groping—and I say it based upon what young Catholics in Poland write—towards completely new images permitting perhaps to grasp religion again as a personal vision. I do not invite you to write theological treatises but much can be accomplished, it seems to me, through literary criticism for instance. (*ibid.*)

Here once again we see Milosz struggling for this new religious view of the world, not dogmatic answers, but something deeply

personal, what in a previous letter he had called theology on “the border between intellect and our imagination.”<sup>21</sup> He pushes Merton to make his contribution there, identifying the contribution as having theological and Catholic roots even if, he clarifies, he is not suggesting that Merton write directly theological treatises. Milosz is urging Merton to be the poet, the man of literature, but to focus on the building up of the new religious vision.

Milosz’s letter was dated March 14. Perhaps it immediately reached in its mark. In his journal on March 18 Merton wrote, “I am not totally happy about the peace movement. There is much that is morally sloppy and irresponsible about it.”<sup>22</sup> On March 21 Merton wrote directly in answer to his friend. He begins, “There are few people whose advice I respect as much as I do yours, and whatever you say I take seriously. Hence I do not feel at all disturbed or unsettled by what you say concerning my articles about peace, because I can see the wisdom of your statements and I agree with them to a great extent” (*STB*, 146; March 21, 1962). He goes on to explain himself and why he has been involved in the peace movement. “The chief reason why I have spoken out was that I felt I owed it to my conscience to do so.” And later, “I have just about said what I have to say. . . . I think I will have to remain available to speak up from time to time about the issue in moments of critical decision, or perhaps not.” And then once again there is another instance of that impressive self-criticism that we have encountered so often in this monk. “In a word I have many doubts myself about all this. It seems to be largely self-deception. Yet to the best of my ability to judge, I feel that what I have done so far was necessary. Perhaps it was not well done. Perhaps it was naïve. Undoubtedly I have not said the last word, nor has all that I have said been perfectly objective and balanced” (*STB*, 147–48). In fact, these words evidence an intriguing combination of dimensions: he is slightly on the defensive but is thereby led to a beautiful examination of conscience. Again I want to suggest that Merton’s ability to confess his limitations in this way is a real monastic contribution. According to the monastic logic of

things, such interior work contributes more to peace than particular public protests.

The question of war and the peace movements of the '60s as Milosz and Merton experienced them is far too complex for us to assign praise or blame within the scope of the present project. I have simply attempted here to follow their interchange, observing always the interface between monastery and society. It should be noted however that, despite the criticism of Merton by Milosz and Merton's accepting many of these criticisms, Merton can still be judged as having made a very important contribution to the peace movement, and this, precisely at a time when someone of his stature as a well-known monk could usefully make his influence felt. A monk takes his stand for peace, despite the ambiguities. Surely we see here a monastic contribution to society. It was not easy for him.<sup>23</sup> Perhaps some measure of Merton's inner struggle and the external opposition he had to face for his position can be heard in one line from the journal where he comments on the decision of the Trappist monastery of Our Lady of the Genesee to build a fallout shelter for the monastic community. He says, "We no longer know what a monk is."<sup>24</sup>

### *Milosz's Problem with Confession*

More than a full year passes before Merton hears from Milosz again, and Merton will let six months pass before responding to that. This does not seem due to any cooling of the relation. Both men were intensely involved in many things other than writing thoughtful letters to each other. When Milosz takes up the contact again, he immediately begins with their usual literary exchanges, passing from this to comments on the scene in Poland and America. For our purposes it is worth viewing a moment in the letter where Milosz shares a personal, spiritual problem he experienced. Here is a lay Catholic sharing frankly with a priest friend his difficulty with the sacrament of Confession.

I went to confession on Easter and, as usual, rather bad results. I have a need of humility and contrition and I am grateful to God. Yet there is something wrong with the institution, how to improve it, I do not know. No absolution can erase the past and, besides, I have a feeling I am a liar—my guilt is shapeless, all-embracing when I try to express it, I distort. And what to confess? I would be happy to know at least my sins, I do not know them, only at moments they appear in a flash and then disappear in a kind of magma. Not to speak of a priest's interests, in rubrics, in Law. (*STB*, 153; May 18, 1963)

Such an honest “confession about confession” could hardly be made had their relationship cooled in Milosz’s mind. It is nothing short of a sharing of spiritual anguish and, said to a priest and monk, it is an implicit appeal for help. “I have a need of humility and contrition.”

For a priest and monk, Merton’s response (six months later) is disappointing. He seems not to have heard any appeal and only joins in his friend’s complaint, and this at a more shallow level. It is what some call nowadays an “enabling” response. He says, “About confession: again I understand what you mean. It is a very institutional sort of thing, especially the ‘Easter duty’ business. But how can one confess to an institution? And what kind of forgiveness is dispensed by an organization? One puts in his bid and gets his return slip” (*STB*, 157; November 11, 1963). We have to wonder if this tone and style of response could have been useful to Milosz. It is puzzling to see Merton respond to him in this way—Merton, who, of course, is capable of profound seriousness around spiritual questions. After his unfair caricature of the institution, Merton does offer a bit of theology about confession, but it could only be described as lightweight, what, with the hindsight of the decades, we might today call ’60s theology. He says, “If I confess a sin it should be because I feel that the sin has divided me from *you*, and has hurt you, or has hurt someone here, closer to me. . . . But the devotional nonsense that tries to cover up the institutional aspect of it with ideas that sin hurts Christ in Himself, now. Nonsense. . . . They [sins] destroy His

likeness in me, they cannot touch Him" (*STB*, 157). Implicit in this, if we think about it a moment, is a rather metaphysical notion of an untouchable God, which hardly does justice to any biblical notions of sin. Merton is right to speak of the interpersonal dimensions of sin, but a Catholic understanding of sin can hardly do without also relating sin directly to one's relationship with God, who must be loved above all things with one's whole mind and heart. Merton should have known that his friend could hardly have been helped by such a reductive version of what sin is. Years later, in his poetry, we will still hear Milosz anguishing over confession and a sense of his sins.<sup>25</sup> For the rest of his life Milosz will continue to search for a personal contact with God that he feels has been ruptured by his sins, even if these "appear [to him] in a flash and then disappear in a kind of magma," as he said.

### *Milosz and Merton on the Church*

There is no record of further correspondence for another ten months. Then there is a short note from Milosz arranging for a visit to Merton at his monastery. This took place in September of 1964.<sup>26</sup> Merton then writes a short note at Christmas time and Milosz responds on New Year's Eve. Merton responds three months later. Not much is added to what we have already seen. The sense of warmth is somehow deepened, most likely because of their having met. The literary exchanges continue, the sharing of news of their own writings, the interchange about peace movements, things in the Church, and the struggle in each man's soul. But then there is a gap of three years. Merton takes up the initiative again at the beginning of 1968, and Milosz answers him, beginning, "I have lived through quite turbulent two years, very emotional" (*STB*, 171; January 15, 1968). Milosz brings his friend quickly up to date on some of what has been happening in his life. There are some harsh lines about changes in the Church due to the Second Vatican Council. The last sentence of this letter is ominous: "My prediction—and I

wish I were wrong—is that the number of homeless religious minds will be rapidly increasing” (*STB*, 173).

Then, as we have seen before, there comes a letter of apology before he has heard from Merton. He says, “I know I wounded you by my last letter. Forgive me. Forgive my stupid and cruel jokes. I am afraid, however, of a misunderstanding. I am not on the side of Catholic conservatives. . . . I have not much interest in the Church” (*STB*, 174; undated). Merton seeks to reassure him, again according to the pattern we have seen of telling Milosz how well he, Merton, understands what Milosz is saying. “There was absolutely nothing wounding in your letter. Anything you may be tempted to think about the Church, I think myself, and much more so as I am in constant contact with all of it” (*STB*, 175; March 15, 1968). As he continues, it seems to me that Merton once again employs that “enabling” style of thinking that may have brought some immediate sense of companionship to Milosz but certainly could not have helped him in the long run. The monk-priest tells the poet who is anguishing over conditions in the Church, “In effect, my ‘happiness’ does not depend on any institution or any establishment. As for you, you are part of my ‘Church’ of friends who are in many ways more important to me than the institution” (*ibid.*). It is not likely that “a Church of friends” would have substituted for all that Milosz knew that the Church, at her best, was meant to bring to the world and to himself. His ominous lines grow even more ominous after Merton’s lightweight response to them: “My prediction—and I wish I were wrong—is that the number of homeless religious minds will be rapidly increasing.”

There are no more letters from Milosz, and Merton will be dead by the end of the year. Merton had seen Milosz again as he passed through California on his way to Asia, the trip from which he would not return. The last words of this compelling exchange are from the monk, just a few weeks before his death. “It was good to see you in SF,” he says (*STB*, 178; November 21, 1968).

Thomas Merton died at the end of 1968, that year that has become the emblematic year with which to summarize so many of the

events and ways of thinking of the tumultuous decade. What a time to have brought to a halt the searching advance of such a creative monastic thinker! His friend Milosz would live another thirty-five years, and naturally he would continue to face in his own life the questions for which he had sought answers, among other ways, together with his monastic friend. These thirty-five years will be years in which Milosz produces some of his most deeply spiritual poems, some of his most deeply Catholic poems.

### *My Personal Story*

At the end of my examination of this correspondence, I hope I may be permitted to share a personal story that puts what we have seen here into a larger context and continues to shed light on the theme of the relationship between monasticism and society. In early 2003 I had written an article on Milosz as a Catholic writer, examining his hesitation to so label himself and at the same time the massive impact of Catholic themes on so much of what he wrote.<sup>27</sup> I sent a draft of this article to a friend of my mine in Krakow, who, without my knowledge, showed it to Milosz. He said to my friend, "I would like to meet this monk." He was not only struck by what I had written; he was also struck that a monk had written it. Since I was living in Rome at that time, a trip to Krakow was possible; and I jumped at the chance of meeting the great poet whose writings I so much admired. Our conversations—we met twice for about an hour—were immediately intense, with him setting the tone and the pace. He asked me virtually at the outset, "Do you *as a monk* find anything useful in my poetry?" I answered him that of course I did and that I would tell him why. But first I wanted to know why he was asking with this emphasis, why the phrase "as a monk." He answered—and this is no secret for those who read him closely—that at the end of his life he doubted the spiritual value of his work. He anguished over this question. Very humbly he thought maybe a monk could tell him if there were any spiritual value in it.

Naturally I was astonished to find myself so suddenly thrust into such a position, but through his writings I knew him well enough to know that he was in deadly earnest. He wanted an evaluation of his poetry *from a monk*. I thought to myself, well, I am a monk, and I have profited from him as a monk. So, I will tell him. On the table before us was a copy of his collected poems spanning more than seventy years. It was a volume I knew well. I picked it up and began reading his poems back to him, telling him of their importance to me, of their “usefulness,” to use his term. It was a moving exchange for both of us. At one point he said to me, “Everybody has always told me that my poetry is great and important to them, but nobody ever tells me why. You are telling me why.”

At another point he asked me if I had read the correspondence between himself and Merton. I had. He said eagerly, “What did you think?” Among the things I told him, I suggested that he had hoped for much from Merton, received much, but in some ways was disappointed. He said, with considerable emotion, “Yes!” It was a long, slow, drawn-out Yes. The he added, “I’m still looking for a monk.”

I had the privilege of writing him at his request during the last year of his life. He proposed many questions—all of them theological and spiritual—that he wanted to hear about from me. He told me that he was too old to be able to write back, but that I should call his secretary and she would tell me his responses. We spoke of many things: suffering, sin, the role of dogma, Job, the death of Jesus, the nature of prayer, the role of the Church, forgiveness of sins. Through it all I was conscious that he was wanting to hear about these things from a monk. I tried to speak to him from this larger place. I don’t mean I said to him things that were not my own, but his way of proposing the question made me particularly aware that my own way of living with life’s questions and seeking answers has been very much shaped by the monastic tradition. I was glad to try to answer him from this space.

## Notes

1. *Striving Toward Being, The Letters of Thomas Merton and Czeslaw Milosz*, ed. Robert Faggen (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1997). Hereafter cited in text as *STB*.
2. The phrase is Robert Faggen's in the introduction to *STB*, vi. See there for a fuller discussion.
3. Citations of letters are according to page numbers in *STB*. I also add, at the first citation of a letter, the date, which in some instances is important in order to see the amount of time between one letter and another and to note that I do not always cite the letters in chronological order. Orthographic errors of the original are preserved here without noting them.
4. He had signed the first letter, "Faithfully yours in Christ, Thomas Merton."
5. Undated letter; stands between Merton's letter of September 12, 1959, and another letter to Merton dated February 28, 1960.
6. Any reader of Milosz is aware of how frequently he addresses this theme in both poetry and prose. See, for example, the poems "Theodicy" or "To Robinson Jeffers" or the essay "Facing Too Large an Expanse," among others.
7. So, we see that it is really Milosz who is pleading for himself, even if he speaks more generally of "a reader." Clearly he is also not meaning "Thomas Merton" as a curious individual but meaning Thomas Merton the famous monk, author of *The Sign of Jonas*.
8. The letter in question is not dated and is followed by another letter dated February 28, 1960. Merton's response is dated May 6, 1960.
9. *A Search for Solitude, The Journals of Thomas Merton 1952-1960*, vol. 3, ed. Lawrence S. Cunningham (San Francisco: Harper San Francisco, 1996), 387.
10. See *Rule of St. Benedict*, chapter 58.
11. In the course of this Milosz comes back to the question of Merton's attitude toward nature and shows himself capable of real give-and-take on this question as on so many others. He says, "In any case I thought when reading Brzozowski that perhaps you, rejecting or not feeling 'iron cruelty' of Nature, were not completely wrong, that we all are perhaps too much influenced by that most demoniac science, biology" (*STB*, 84; July 8, 1960).
12. Milosz's letter is dated October 30, 1960, and is sent from California. Merton's reply is dated November 9, 1960.
13. *Turing Toward the World, The Journals of Thomas Merton 1960-1963*, vol. 4, ed. Victor A. Kramer (San Francisco: Harper San Francisco, 1996), 103.
14. The second drawback that Merton mentions is that Daniélou writes too much. This is an amusing complaint coming from Merton.
15. This was later published in Merton's *Emblems of a Season of Fury* (Norfolk, CT: J. Laughlin, 1963) and in *The Collected Poems of Thomas Merton* (New York: New Directions, 1977).
16. *Journals*, vol. 4, 162.

17. *Ibid.*, 164.
18. See Milosz raising this same question earlier, in a letter dated March 21, 1959, 30–31. For Milosz as a Catholic writer, see my article, “The Witness of Czeslaw Milosz,” in *First Things* (November 2004): 28–33.
19. *Journals*, v. 4, 200–1.
20. *Ibid.*, 201–2.
21. See the letter cited on p. 20 (*SBI*, 61).
22. *Journals*, vol. 4, p. 211.
23. It must be admitted that there was no clear antiwar voice from the Catholic hierarchy in United States at that time.
24. *Journals*, vol. 4, 222. In fact, if one pages through the journal during the months surrounding the two letters of Milosz and the response of Merton, indeed, for the first six months of 1962, it is striking to see how often Merton reflects on what his responsibilities are on the question of war and peace. For example, just three days after his letter to Milosz, Merton writes, “It is clear to me that under cover of being honest, frank and just I have been too eager to speak and too eager to say things that a few people wanted to hear—and most people did not want to hear. Better to have waited and simply tried to say, with utmost care, what is true” (213; March 24). Or again, “Need for discretion. Especially in my writing, I need to check and recheck. Above all my conviction that I am bound in conscience to speak out on such an issue does not guarantee that I know what to say” (213; March 26). Concerning the possibility of being prevented by his monastic superiors from speaking further on peace, he writes, “If this is indeed a valid ‘sacrifice’ and not just an evasion, I will gladly make it” (216; April 27). When such an order comes a month later, he writes, “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” (221; May 26). Yet, despite all these doubts, he continues to follow the issues closely and within the ambiguities will continue to speak out.
25. See, for example, the poem “Prayer,” in *New and Collected Poems 1931–2001* (New York: Ecco, 2003), written as Milosz approached ninety. Or see also “My Secrets,” “If,” “Hear Me,” all poems of his old age.
26. Merton mentions this briefly in a journal entry dated September 10, 1964.
27. This article, “‘Inheritor’: A Poem by Czeslaw Milosz,” appeared in *Logos* 8, no. 4 (Fall 2005), 35–46.